

# THE WELL OF DAYS



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IVAN BUNIN

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY  
GILLIAN SIRUVE AND HAMISH MILES



NEW EDITION

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## **BOOK ONE**



# I

**"SUCH things and deeds as are not written down are covered with darkness, and given over to the sepulchre of oblivion, whilst those that are written down are like unto animate ones. . . ."**

**What, then, is my life, and what, in general, are human "things and deeds" ?**

**I, Alexey Alexandrovich Arseniev, was born half-a-century ago in Central Russia, in the country, on my father's manor.**

**We are devoid of a sense of our beginning and end. And it is a great pity that I was told when exactly I was born. Had I not been told, I should have no idea of my age—the more so as I do not as yet at all feel its burden—and should therefore be spared the absurd thought that I must needs die in ten or in twenty years' time. And had I been born and lived on a desert island, I should not have suspected even the existence of death. "What luck that would have been!" I am tempted to add. Yet who knows? Perhaps, a great misfortune. Besides, is it really true that I should not have suspected it? Are we not born with the sense of death? and if not, if I had not suspected it, should I be so fond of life as I am, and as I used to be?**

And should I have devoted my life as I have done, almost without reserve, to my craft of letters, to the realization and animation of my things and deeds, a tendency which perhaps arises merely from the dread of that sepulchre of oblivion?

Of the Arseniev stock and its origin, I really know nothing. What after all do we know? I only know that in the Armorial our family is included among those "whose origins are lost in the mists of time." I know that our family is "noble though impoverished," and that all my life I was aware of that nobility, feeling proud and glad that I am not one of those who have neither kith nor kin. On the day dedicated to the Holy Ghost, the Church, mindful that "every soul is animated by the Holy Ghost," invites us at Mass to "do homage to the memory of all who died since time began." It offers up on that day a beautiful prayer full of deep meaning:

"O Lord, let all Thy servants rest within Thy courts and in Abraham's bosom—from Adam even to those among our fathers and brethren, friends and kinsmen, who have served Thee this day in purity!"

Is it accidental that service is here mentioned? Is it not a joy to feel one's connection, one's communion, with "our fathers and brethren, friends and kinsmen" who have sometime done that service? Our remotest ancestors, too, believed in the doctrine of the "pure, continual Path of the

father of all that is," handed on from mortal parents to mortal offspring through immortal "continual" life; they believed that it was commanded by the will of Agni to keep the purity, the continuity of blood and stock, in order to prevent the desecration of that Path, lest it should be interrupted, forgotten, given over to oblivion; they believed that every birth must further purify the blood of those born, and enhance the closeness of their kinship with Him Who is the sole father of all that is.

Among my ancestors there were probably many bad men too. And yet from generation to generation my ancestors enjoined one another to remember and observe their blood. They had rules which they thought it their sacred duty to instil—and did instil them—in one another's soul: *Be worthy of your nobility; be a good son of the church and of your country; serve them; keep your word, your vows; try to be truthful, charitable, generous, unselfish, dauntless and fair in battle, pure in love and wedlock.* And how shall I express the emotions with which I sometimes look at our family crest? A knight's armour, coat of mail and helmet with ostrich feathers; and beneath, a shield; and on its azure field, in the middle—a ring, emblem of loyalty and eternity, towards which, from above and below, point three rapiers with cross-shaped hilts. . . .

In the country which for me has replaced my native land, there are many towns like the one which

gave me refuge, towns once glorious but now decayed, poor, living out their humdrum everyday life. And yet over that life there always reigns—and not in vain—some grey tower of the Crusaders' times, the vast mass of a cathedral with its glorious portal guarded by an immemorial guard of sacred carven figures, a cock perched high up on the cross, God's exalted herald calling towards the celestial City. . . .

## II

My early childhood is infinitely remote and vague, and I do not even believe now that it ever existed. My first recollection of that time is, of course, something casual, trivial and yet perplexing. I call to mind a large room lit by the sun of a late summer's day, spreading its parching glow over the sloping hill-side, over the golden, dry, reaped fields seen through the window facing south. . . . And that is all—only one single instant! Why was it just on that day and in that hour, at that precise moment, and on such a slight occasion, that my consciousness for the first time flamed up so brightly as to make it already possible for my memory to come into play? And why, immediately afterwards, was it extinguished for a long time?

I always remember my early childhood with sadness. Every childhood is sad; scant is that quiet world in which a timid and tender soul not yet quite awakened to life is dreaming its dream of

life, still alien to everybody and everything. Golden childhood, a happy time,—people usually say. No, it is an unhappy, morbidly sensitive, miserable time.

Was my childhood sad for some particular reason? The fact, for instance, that I grew up amid great solitude? Lonely fields, a solitary manor in their midst. . . . In winter, a boundless snowy sea; in summer, a sea of cornfields, grass, and flowers. And the eternal quietude of those fields; their enigmatic and unresponsive silence. . . . But, does a dormouse or a lark grow sad in quiet and seclusion? No, they ask for nothing, they marvel at nothing, they do not feel that hidden presence which the human soul always fancies in the world surrounding it; they know neither the call of spaces nor the course of time. I knew all that even then, and it secretly tormented me. The depth of the summer evening sky, the melancholy vista of the fields betokened something else that seemed to exist apart from them, called forth a dream and a yearning after something I lacked, moved me with an incomprehensible love and tenderness, I knew not for whom or for what. . . .

Where were human beings at that time? Our estate was called Kamenka Farm; our main estate was considered to be the one on the other side of the Don, where my father used often to go for long periods. At the farm the household was small, and the servants few. Still, there were people,

some life was going on. There were dogs, horses, sheep, cows, farm-hands, there was the coachman, the bailiff, the servants' cook, the cook, the cattle-woman, the poultry-woman, the nurse, father and mother, the brothers who were at school, sister Olya still rocked in her cradle in the nursery. But why has my memory retained only moments of utter solitude? What things do I remember, as in a dream?—Here, a fine summer day is drawing towards evening. The sun is already behind the house, behind the garden; the large deserted courtyard lies in shadow, and I (quite, quite alone in the world) am lying on its green cool grass, looking into the bottomless blue sky, as if into some wonderful and intimate eye, into my own paternal bosom. There, high up, floats a white cloud; growing rounder, it slowly changes shape and melts away in that concave blue abyss. How isolated from it I am, after all! What poignant beauty! I long to board that cloud, and sail and sail on it in those uncanny heights, in the spaces beneath the firmament, close to God, close to the white-winged angels who dwell somewhere there, in that heavenly world!—Here, I am outside the manor, in the fields. The evening seems to be always the same, only here the low sun still gleams warmly. Turning round, I see it across those infinitely remote western fields where, on the horizon, one can just distinguish Baturino—those mysterious parts, still unknown to me, my mother's country. And



in front of me stretches another prospect, disappearing far southwards where something vaguely blue, touched just a little with lilac, and seeming like some barely visible sea, merges into the sky, calling me, drawing me somewhere. And there I stand gazing and listening to the vast quietude enshrouding me, and wait for something, think of something unutterably beautiful and sad that is in the world and especially there, in that far-away distance. The desolate field-road where I stand is overgrown with grey-green pig-weed, and with pale-pink dodder, womanly in its humility. Round me, wherever the eye turns, stretch the spiked fields of rye and oats and wheat, and in their midst, in the dense thicket of inclined stalks, the partridges live their hidden watchful lives. At present they are still silent, but then everything is silent; only at times a little russety corn-beetle, entangled in the spikes, starts humming, starts a gloomy buzz. I disentangle it and examine it eagerly, with surprise: what is it, who is it, this russety beetle? Where does it live? Whither and for what purpose was it flying? What does it think and feel? It is angry, earnest; it bustles in my fingers, making a rustling noise with its hard wing-cases from beneath which peeps out something very fine, pinkish-yellow; then suddenly the tiny shields of those wing-cases go asunder, and open out, the pinkish-yellow something also opens. out—how gracefully!—and the beetle rises

in the air humming now with delight, with relief, and quits me for ever, vanishes into the sky, enriching me with a new emotion—leaving behind in me the sadness of parting. . . .

Or else, I see myself in the house, again on a summer evening, again in solitude. The sun has vanished behind the quiet evening garden whose tree-tops are still sprinkled with its red-gold dust; it has abandoned the empty hall, the empty drawing-room where it shone the whole day long; now its last lonely ray shows red in the corner on the floor, between the tall legs of a small antique table, and oh! how tantalizing is its sad, speechless beauty. Late in the evening, when the garden already stood black behind the windows, with all its mysterious nocturnal blackness, and I lay in my cot in the dark bedroom, there looked at me through the window, from on high, some tranquil star. . . . What did it ask of me? What silent message did it bring me, whither did it call? And of what did it remind me?

### III

CHILDHOOD began gradually to link me up with life, and in my recollections of it there are already glimpses of a few persons, of a few scenes of manor life, a few happenings. . . .

Among these happenings, the first place—in time, and also perhaps in significance—is held by

the first journey of my life, the farthest and the most extraordinary of all my subsequent voyages on sea and overland. Father and mother were going to the forbidden land called "town," and they took me with them. This, too, is still a dream, infinitely remote, of which my memory holds only a few separate moments; but what moments they are. Here for the first time I experienced the sweetness of a dream about to come true, and at the same time the fear that for some reason it might not come true. I remember even now how I stood languishing in the middle of the courtyard, exposed in the sun, looking at the tarantass which had already been taken out of the coach-house, and asking myself, When would the horses at last be harnessed, when would the preparations for departure be finished? I remember even the cursory and absolutely incomprehensible answer of the coachman to my pestering questions as to whether we should soon be starting.

"When soon, then at once," he answered me.

I remember further that we drove for an eternity, that there was no end to fields, to valleys, dales, field-roads, cross-roads, and that by the way there was the following incident: in one of the dales—it was drawing towards evening and the place was quite deserted—there was a thick oak undergrowth, dark green and frizzly; and on the opposite slope there was, stealthily making his way among the coppice, a "brigand" with an axe

through his belt—the most mysterious and the most terrible, perhaps, of all the peasants I ever saw, not only then, but since. At the approach of the town I was struck by some magnificent yellow rocks, their stratified steepness directly lit up by the setting sun. . . . How we entered the town, I do not know—the journey must have so utterly overcome me that I fell asleep. But then what a wonderful moment I lived through in the morning! I was hanging over a precipice, in a narrow ravine of huge houses I had never seen before, and I was blinded by the glitter of the sun, the window-panes, the signboards, the elegance of the crowd filling the street below; and above me, around me, all over the world there was diffused some marvellous musical medley: the ringing and booming of the bells from the belfry of St. Michael's Church which rose above everything in a magnificence and splendour of which St. Peter's of Rome had never dreamt, and so huge that afterwards I could never be struck by the pyramid of Cheops.

But the most marvellous of all things in the town proved to be the boot-polish. Poor human heart! I am not joking in the least: never in my life did I experience from things seen by me on earth—and I have seen many things—such rapture, such joy, as I did in the market of that town holding in my hands the box of boot-polish. That round box was made of simple bast, but what bast it was! And with what incomparable artistic skill the box

was made! And the polish itself! Black, tough; with a dull lustre and an intoxicating spirituous smell. And then there were two other great joys: I was given little buskins with red morocco-leather edging on the uppers, about which the coachman again said something that I remembered all my life through: "Boots to perfection!"—and a leather riding-crop with a whistle in its handle. . . . How blissfully, how voluptuously did I finger that morocco-leather and that elastic, flexible leather thong! At home, lying in my cot, I simply gasped with happiness at the thought that beside the cot stood my new boots, that under the pillow was hidden the riding-crop. And the familiar star was looking from above into the window of the bedroom, saying to me: *Here, now all is well, there can and need be nothing better in the world.*

The same trip, which first disclosed to me the joys of earthly existence, left me with another deep impression, which I received on the way back. We left town just before evening driving through the long wide street which already struck me as quite poor in comparison with the one where stood our hotel and St. Michael's Church; we crossed a spacious square, and once more in the distance there opened up before us the familiar world—the fields, their rural simplicity and freedom. Our way lay directly to the west, towards the setting sun, and here I saw all of a sudden that there was one more man who was staring at that sun and at those fields.

At the very exit from the town there rose an extraordinarily huge and extraordinarily dreary yellow house which had almost nothing in common with any house I had hitherto seen. It had a great many small windows, and in every window was an iron grating; it was enclosed by a high stone wall, and the big gate in that wall was hermetically closed; and behind the grating of one of those windows there stood a man in a grey cloth blouse and a cap to match, with a yellowish puffy face. On that face was written something complicated and painful, something which again I had never seen in my life (and which, of course, I can only now somehow put into words): a mixture of the deepest longing, sorrow, blunt resignation, and at the same time some passionate and sombre dream, a greedy attention to that departing sun. . . . Of course, I was told what that house was, and who the man in the grated window was; it was from father and mother that I learned the existence in the world of that particular class of people called criminals, convicts, thieves, murderers. But then, the knowledge we acquire during our short personal life is too scanty—there is another, infinitely richer, that with which we are born. My parents' explanations would not have been enough to account for the feelings which the grating and that man's face called forth in me: I felt for myself, I divined for myself, with the aid of my own knowledge, his peculiar, his uncanny soul. The peasant had been terrible stealing through the oak

undergrowth in the dale, with an axe through his girdle. But he was a brigand—I never doubted that for a moment; it was something very terrible, but also fascinating, fairy. And this convict, this grating. . . .

Enthusiastic impressions at first stifled the painful effect of that vision. And then it sprang up again, and to this day still lives within me.

#### IV

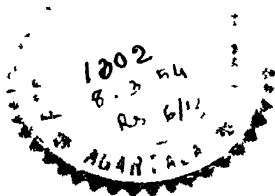
My further recollections of my first years on earth are more commonplace and definite, though no less scanty, casual, and disjointed: what, I repeat, do we know, what do we remember—we who sometimes remember even our yesterdays with difficulty?

My childish soul begins to get used to its new abode, to find in it a great deal of happy charm, to view the beauty of nature already without pain, to notice people and to bear different, and more or less conscious, feelings towards them.

The world is still confined, in my eyes, to the manor, and as for human beings, my attention is drawn above all by those nearest to me. I have not only noticed and felt father, his dear existence, but also scrutinised him: strong, high-spirited, careless, easily inflammable and at times even terrifying, but cooling down very easily, and at bottom very kind and generous. He loathed malicious and spiteful people, and was marvellously inconsistent: often he

would be shouting in a rage that he would never forgive somebody for something, and an hour later he would wave his hand and say: "Devil take him, after all!" I began to take an interest in him, and already came to learn something about him: that he never did anything—and in truth spent his days in that happy idleness which was then so characteristic not only of the life of the country gentlemen, but of Russian life in general; that he was always very animated before dinner and gay at the table; that, on waking up from his after-dinner nap, he was fond of sitting by an open window and drinking some acid water with soda, delightfully fizzy, tickling one's nose, and that in those moments he would suddenly catch me, put me on his knees, hugging and kissing, and then as suddenly put me down and forget, disliking anything durable. . . . I came to feel not only a sympathy for him, but at times also a delighted tenderness; I already liked him, he satisfied my forming tastes by his courageous looks, by the straightforwardness of his changeable character, and above all, I think, by the fact that he had sometime taken part in a war in a place called Sevastopol, and was now a huntsman, a wonderful shot—he could hit a twenty kopecks coin thrown into the air—and so excellently, with so much heart, and when need be so skilfully, so captivately, played songs on the guitar, especially the old popular songs of the grandfathers' happy days. . . .

I also noticed at last our nanny; that is to say,





I realized the presence in the house, the particular nearness to our nursery, and some peculiarities of that large, stately, authoritative woman, who, although she always called herself our servant, was in fact a member of our family; and if she quarrelled (which she did often enough) with our mother, it was only because it was absolutely necessary to their reciprocal love and their need for tears and reconciliation shortly after the quarrel. My brothers were not of my age at all, and already lived a life of their own, coming to us in the holidays; recollecting my childhood, I scarcely see them; but then I found that I possessed two sisters, of whom I also at last became aware, and whom I associated in different ways, but equally closely, with my own existence: I felt a tender love for the chubby, laughing, blue-eyed Nadya who took her turn in the cradle, and imperceptibly began to share all my plays and pastimes, joys and sorrows, and sometimes also the most intimate dreams and thoughts, with the black-eyed Olya, an impetuous girl who flamed up easily like father, but who fundamentally was also very kind and sympathetic, and soon grew to be my faithful friend. As to mother, of course I noticed and understood her before all the others. Mother was to me, among all the rest, quite a special being, inseparable from my own, and I probably noticed and felt her at the same time as myself.

With mother is connected the bitterest love of all my life. Everything and everybody we love

is our torment, albeit a sweet and joyful torment, —think only of that eternal fear of losing the beloved person, and the consciousness of the frailty of all earthly things. And from my early childhood I bore the great burden of my immutable love for her who, having given me life, had filled my soul with torment, and filled it the more since, her soul being brimful with love, she was also a sorrow incarnate. How many tears had I seen in her eyes as a child, how many sad songs had I heard from her lips!

In her far-off native land, let her rest in peace, lonely, forgotten for ever by all the world, and let her precious name be blessed for all time! Her destiny has been fulfilled, just as the destiny of the man with whom, by the great sacrament of love and conceptions, was linked her earthly existence. Is it really possible that, until the very end of time, I shall never again see his lively face, nor hear his loud voice, nor kiss his strong hand? And is it really possible that she whose eyeless skull and grey bones are lying somewhere there, in the church-yard grove of an out-of-the-way Russian town, at the bottom of a now nameless grave, is it really possible that she it was who used once to rock me in her arms and sing to me about "a young messenger riding in the steppe and carrying a letter?"

Terrible, inconceivable is life! "My ways are above your ways and My thoughts above your thoughts."

## V

THUS passed away the loneliness of my childhood. Again, I remember: one autumn night something woke me up and I saw the room filled with a mysterious twilight, and in the great uncurtained window a pale, sad autumnal moon standing high, high over the empty courtyard of the manor, invested by its own sadness and loneliness with such unearthly charm that my heart also was seized with an ineffable bitter-sweetness that seemed to be just what suffused that pale autumnal moon. But I already knew and remembered that I was not alone in the world, that I was sleeping in father's study—I cried, I called, I woke up father. . . . In this way, gradually, human beings were entering into my life, and becoming inalienably part of it, first my own people, the nearest, and then the others—from the farm and from the neighbouring villages: Vyselki, Novoselki, Rozhdestvo, Baturino. . . .

I already noticed that in the world, besides summer, there were autumn, winter, spring, when one could be but rarely outdoors. Yet at first I did not remember them—the childish soul is impressed above all by the bright and sunny—and so now I recall, apart from that autumn night, only two or three dark pictures, and these only because they were out of the ordinary: a certain winter evening with a terrible and fascinating

snowstorm behind the walls—terrible because everybody said it was so on the eve of the Day of the Forty Martyrs, and fascinating because the more terribly did the wind shake the walls, the more did one enjoy the warmth and snugness of their protection. And again, a certain winter morning when something really remarkable happened: on waking up we saw a strange twilight in the house, we saw that from the courtyard something whitish and incredibly huge was obstructing the light, rising above the house,—and we realized that a snowdrift had blocked us in the night, which it took the farmhands the whole day to clear. And finally, a certain gloomy April day when a man, dressed only in a light coat, appeared suddenly in our courtyard, tottering and bent in the icy wind that drove him along, poor bandy-legged devil, pitifully gripping the cap on his head with one hand, whilst the other clumsily pulled the coat over his breast. . . . Yet, on the whole, I say, my early childhood appears to me only as a string of summer days, the joy of which I shared almost invariably, first with Olya, and then with the peasant children from Vyselki, a village of a few homesteads over beyond the Gap, about three quarters of a mile from us.

Poor was that joy, almost as poor as the one I had experienced from the boot polish and the little riding crop. All human joys are poor; there lives within us something which at times inspires us with

a bitter self-pity. But perhaps the most pitiful are the joys and dreams and hopes of our childhood and adolescence: for how innocently and utterly confident in life we are in those days! Here I am come for the first time and for so brief a span upon the earth. And yet what joys were mine in the morning of my life?

A land without history, with no trace of former life, like nearly the whole of our immense country. Neither mountains, nor rivers, nor lakes, nor forests,—only the undergrowth in the dales, copses here and there, and occasionally a sort of wood, the Zakaz, or the Dubrovka; for the rest it was fields, fields, a boundless ocean of cornfields. It was not the steppe where the eye plunges for hundreds of miles into the blue distance, with browsing flocks of scores of thousands of sheep, where one drives for a whole hour through some village or Cossack settlement, marvelling at their whiteness, cleanliness, populousness, wealth, at the gay and easy swing of their life. It was only Substeppe, where the fields are undulating with ravines and hills everywhere, and shallow meadows, mostly stony; where the tiny villages and their bast-shod inhabitants seem to be God-forsaken—so unpretentious are they, so primevally simple, so close akin to their willows and stubble. And here I am, growing up, learning to know the world and life in that deserted yet beautiful country, through its long summer days. . One of the very first pictures of that time

seems to be this: hot noontide, white clouds float in the blue sky, a wind blows, now warm, now quite hot, bringing the sun's heat and the odours of warmed-up corn and grass, and there, in the field, beyond our old granaries—they are so old that their thick thatched roofs look grey and solid like stone, and the beamed walls have become bluish-grey—there is the ardour of the sun, the glitter, the June abundance and splendour of light, of life, and shot with dull silver there run and run without end, on the hillside, the waves of an unfathomable sea of rye, already tall and dense. They are glossy, they undulate, and run and run, enjoying their own density, their own impetuosity, and over them run the shadows of the clouds, and somewhere there, along the boundaries, there runs "a mounted Cossack, a young messenger. . . ."

And then, in the middle of our courtyard, thickly overgrown with curly grass, there was a sort of ancient stone trough under which one could play hide-and-seek, taking off one's shoes and running with white bare feet (their whiteness pleased even oneself) on that green curly grass, hot with the sun on the top, and cool underneath, the two sensations so delicious in unison. And by the walls of the granaries there proved to be shrubs of henbane of which Olya and I once ate so much that we had to be given fresh milk—so marvellously dizzy were our heads, whilst soul and body were filled with the desire, and even a sense of the absolute power,

to rise in the air and fly anywhere. . . . By the granaries, too, we found countless nests of big, velvety-black and golden humble-bees, whose presence underground we guessed, putting our ears to the ground, by the dull, fiercely threatening buzzing; their stings smarted intolerably, and their honey was thinner but sweeter than the bees'. And how many roots did we discover, bitter but quite edible, how many sweet stems and grains in the kitchen-garden, in the thickets of the orchard, round the corn-barn, on the barn-floor and behind the servants' cottage the back wall of which was close to the fields and meadows!

## VI

BEHIND the servants' quarters, and under the walls of the cattle-yard, grew enormous burdocks, tall nettles, both dead and stinging, luxurious crimson cotton-thistles with prickly little crowns, and something full-blown, pale-green, called viper's grass, and each had its own special look, colour, smell, and taste. The little under-herdsman whose existence we also had at last discovered, was extremely interesting; his hempen-cloth shirt and short trousers were all rags, his feet, hands and face were dried and burnt by the sun, and peeled off, his lips were sore, for he always munched something: now a crust of sour rye-bread, now the burdocks, now that very viper's grass which corroded his lips to real wounds.

His sharp eyes strayed stealthily: he realized very well all the enormity of our friendship with him, as also of the fact that he incited us to eat goodness knows what. But how sweet was that guilty friendship, and all his tatters, scurf, sloughs, and even "chaps"—that rash on account of which we were forbidden to hobnob with him. How enthralling everything was that he told us—secretly, in snatches, constantly turning round. Besides, he could crack his long whip wonderfully as if he were firing a pistol, and he would laugh a devilish laugh when we tried to do the same, making our ears tingle with the end of the lash. He was also the first to awaken in me the sense of something shameful, uncanny: he told me a good deal of his observations of the cattle in the field, in the herd. . . .

But for real abundance of all fruits of the earth one had to go to the kitchen-garden, situated between the cattle-yard and the stables. Imitating the herdsboy, one could secure a salted crust of black bread and eat long green arrows of onions with their grey grainy nodules at the end, the red radish, the white horse-radish, the small cucumbers, still hairy and pimply, which it gave one such pleasure to seek out rustling under the endless creeping suckers covering the friable beds. . . . What did we want it all for? Were we hungry? No, of course not, but during that meal we communed unawares with the earth, with all that sensuous, material substance of which the world is made. I remember:



hotter and hotter the sun was scorching the grass and the stone trough in the courtyard, the air was growing heavier and duller, the clouds were gathering up ever slower and closer, until they were shot through with a sharp crimson gleam and began, somewhere in their farthest reverberating heights, to rumble, and then to thunder, to roll in resonant booming, to roar with mighty claps, growing ever heavier, ever more grandiose, ever more magnificent. . . . Oh! how I felt that divine splendour of the world, and of God who ruled over it and had created it in such fulness and force of solid substance! Then came darkness, flames, hurricane, a violent downpour with crashing hail; everywhere everything was tossed about, quaked, seemed to be perishing; all windows in the house were closed and curtained, and a Passion-week wax candle was lighted before the black ikons in their ancient silver frames; people made the sign of the cross repeating: "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth!" But then what a relief it was afterwards, when everything grew calm and quiet, breathing freely the ineffably delightful damp freshness of the soaked fields; when the windows in the house were once more thrown open; and my father sitting by the study's window and looking at the cloud which still hid the sun and stood like a black wall in the east, beyond the kitchen-garden, sent me there to bring him a nice big horse-radish. Few moments in my life could match that one—when I ran quickly over the

tall glistening weeds, got the horse-radish, and greedily bit off its tail together with the thick blue mud that had stuck to it. . . .

And then, gradually growing bolder, we learned to know the cattle-yard, the stables, the coach-house, the farmyard, the Gap, Vyselki. The world expanded more and more, became more and more concrete; yet at first it was not men and human life, but vegetable and animal life that most attracted our attention, and our favourite haunts were still those where there were no men, our favourite time of the day—the afternoon when men slept. The garden was gay and green, but already familiar to us; the only attractive things in it were the thickets and copses, the birds' nests (especially if inside them, in those little cups tressed with twigs and carpeted with something soft and warm, there sat, looking out with sharp black beads, something parti-coloured), and the raspberry bushes where the berries tasted incomparably better than those we used to eat with milk and sugar after dinner. And so—the cattle-yard, the stables, the coach-house, the corn-barn in the farmyard, the Gap. . . .

## VII

EVERY place had its own charm.

In the cattle-yard, deserted the whole day long, the gate creaked with lazy roughness when we pushed it open with all our puny might, and it

smelt pungently, foully, but with an irresistible attraction, of dung and pig-sties.

In the stables the horses lived their own horsey life, which consisted of standing up and noisily chewing hay and oats. How and when did they sleep? The coachman said that they, too, sometimes lay down and slept. But this was difficult and even somehow uncanny to imagine—horses are heavy and clumsy in lying down. This evidently happened but rarely, and during the most desolate hours of the night; as a rule the horses stood in their stalls, and all day long kept grinding the oats with their teeth to a milky substance, and worried the hay, picking it with their soft lips; and they were all fine and powerful, with glossy croups which it was a great pleasure to touch, with stiff tails reaching to the ground, and feminine manes, with large violet eyes which they sometimes squinted menacingly and wonderfully, reminding us of the terrible thing which the coachman had told us: that all horses had their special day in a year, the day of St. Flor and St. Laurus when they were intent on killing man in order to revenge themselves for their enslavement, for their horsey life, which consisted in the eternal expectation of being harnessed, in fulfilling their strange destiny in this world—only to carry, only to run. . . . Here, too, it smelt strongly, and also of dung, but not at all in the same way as in the cattle-yard, the dung being quite different, its smell mingling with the smell of the horses themselves, of

the harness, of the rotting hay, and of something else peculiar to stables.

And in the coach-house stood the droshky, the tarantass, the old-fashioned grandfather's coach on runners; the coachman slept on the floor, on felt, opposite the gate which always stood open. . . . The vehicles were associated with dreams of long voyages; at the back of the tarantass was a curious and mysterious travelling box; the coach attracted one by its old-fashioned clumsiness, and by the secret presence of something that was left over in the world after grandfather; it was like nothing modern, whilst the coachman, in his worn large corduroy knickers, nailed boots and yellow shirt, was a man detached from the rest of the servants, gloomily conscious of his own detachment, and everlastingly asleep. Why was he always asleep? Any way, did the swallows like the stables so much? They darted to and fro incessantly, like black arrows, now from the stables into the blue celestial expanse, now back again into the gate and under the roof, where they modelled their rounded, firm, chalky nests, so extraordinarily attractive in their firmness, their shapeliness, and the skill of their modelling. It often occurs to me now: "Well, you will die, and never again see the sky, the trees, the birds, nor many, many other things to which you are accustomed, which have grown to be part of you, and with which it will be such grief to part." As for the swallows, it will certainly be a great grief: what lovely, tender, pure beauty! And

how graceful those little birds are with their lightning flight, their pink-and-white breasts, their small blue-black heads with blue-black wings to match, pointed, long, folded crosswise, and always twittering so happily. The gate was always open, the coachman always slept—there was nothing to prevent us from dropping into the coach-house whenever we liked, and watching those twittering creatures for hours; from dreaming of catching one of them; from sitting astride on the droshky; from getting into the tarantass, or the coach, and travelling somewhere far, far away. Why is man, from his childhood onwards, allured by distance, by things wide and deep and high, by the unknown and dangerous, by the things that enable him to swing his life round or even to lose it for the sake of something or somebody? Would this have been possible if our lot were confined to that “which God has given”, only to the earth, only to this one life? Obviously, God has given us much more. Recalling the fairy tales read or heard in childhood, I still feel that the most fascinating things in them were words about the unknown and the unusual. “In a certain kingdom, in an unknown land, beyond thirty-nine countries. . . . Beyond the mountains, beyond the valleys, beyond the blue seas. . . . The Maiden-King, Vasilisa the Wise. . . .”

And the corn-barn was fascinatingly terrifying by its grey strawy bulkiness, by the sinister emptiness, the vastness, the twilight inside, and by the

fact that when one got inside, ducking under the gate, one could lose oneself as one listened to the wind groping and rustling and soughing; in one corner hung a holy tablet covered with dust, but people said that the devil came there at night nevertheless, and this combination of the devils and the tablet so dangerous to them inspired (and still does) particularly frightening thoughts. And further on, beyond the granary and the farmyard, beyond the tumbledown kiln and the millet field, was the Gap. It was a narrow but very deep dell with steep slopes and the famous "gap" at the bottom, overgrown with tall weeds and silver-grey osiers. To me it was the most desolate of all the desolate spots in the world. The afternoon sun stood high, it was still hot everywhere else, and there it was already cool and shadowy, growing chilly, and smelling of cool grass. What a blessed silence, what sweet solitude always reigned there! One would fain sit in that dell for a lifetime, loving and pitying someone. What a lovely flower—both in aspect and in name—grew in the thick, tall grass on its slopes—the crimson Virgin's Flower, with a brown sticky stem! And how sad and tender sounded the brief song of the greenfinch in the weeds! Chirp-chirp-chirp. . . .

Never again shall I see that dell nor listen to the greenfinch. And already all those with whom I had started and afterwards shared my life have either disappeared for ever from this world or are some-

where, thousands of miles away from me, separated from one another, no longer wanted by any one, even by one another, living out their last wretched days. Where is that herdsboy now, where is the coachman? Where are those who were our first friends on the path of life, the barefooted, bright-eyed peasant boys from Vyselki, reeking of the smoky peasant-cottages?

## VIII

HENCEFORTH my childish life becomes more commonplace and more varied. I begin more and more to notice the life of the manor, to pay more frequent visits to Vyselki; I have already been to Rozhdestvo, to Novoselki, at the grandmother's in Baturino, at the farm of the Prince, a relative of ours who lived a real peasant's life.

In the manor, early in the morning, at sunrise, with the first twittering of the birds in the garden, where the tree-tops are already touched with gold, father wakes up. Fully convinced that everybody must wake up with him, he coughs loudly, bangs the doors, passes through the house with rapid and heavy strides, shaking the floor-boards, and shouts at the top of his voice: "Dashka, the samovar!" We also wake up, full of joy at the sunny morning—the rest of them, I repeat, I still don't want to or can't notice—eager and impatient to run down to the cherry orchard, to pick our favourite cherries—bird-pecked and sun-baked—to search the crooked

old cherry-trees for the tough, transparent cherry-gum to tear off and eat. Sometimes the morning is so quiet and fresh that the ringing of the church bells comes in musical peals from Rozhdestvo, giving one a poetic sense of the dewy fields behind which Rozhdestvo lies hidden, of its nearness and yet remoteness, of God's blessing descending upon humble and good things, which must be, and will again be, in the proper sequence of peaceful rural days. In the cattle-yard at that hour the gate creaks in a new, a matutinal way, and from it, with bellowing, yelping, and whip-cracking, driven to the succulent morning pastures, there emerge cows and pigs and the grey-curled, compact, and agitated herd of sheep; horses are driven to the field pond, and the earth rings to the strong stamp of their hooves as they pass in a tight drove, whilst in the servants' cottage and the manor-house kitchen the ovens are already ablaze with orange flames; the eager work of the cooks begins, and the dogs gather under the windows and on the thresholds to watch and sniff, often jumping away with a yelp. . . . After the morning tea, father sometimes takes me with him in the droshky to the field where, perhaps, according to the season, there may be ploughing going on, and barefooted, hatless, unkempt peasants walk and walk with swinging strides, stumbling in the soft furrows, their bodies following the straining of the horses, and the groaning ploughs, whose shares turn over the moist layers of earth; or numberless young



girls, whose motley colours, pertness, laughter, and songs rejoice the heart, may be harvesting millet, or potatoes; or else the mowers, their backs black with sweat, their shirts unbuttoned at the neck, their heads bound with strips of cloth, are swinging their swishing scythes with a curtseying movement, straddling their legs, felling the thick wall of hot yellow rye, all of them strong, picked men, amongst whom there are always a few celebrities—and behind them the women with tucked-up skirts, and for some reason mostly pregnant, work with rakes and, bending over and stooping, wrestle with the prickly, big-headed sheafs smelling of sun-warmed golden rye, trampling them with their knees and binding them closely up. . . . What an inexpressibly fascinating sound it is—the sound of a scythe being sharpened, its glistening blade being skilfully whetted, now on one side now on the other, with a short piece of wood rough with sand and steeped in water. There is always some mower who will not fail to delight one—by telling how he nearly sliced a whole nest of partridges and failed to catch a partridge, or cut a snake in two. And as to women, I already know that they sometimes reap at night, if there is a moon—by day it is too dry, the ears of grain come to pieces—and I feel the poetic charm of that night-toil, with envy of them.

Do I remember many such days? Of course, very few; the morning which I imagine now is

made up of patchy pictures, fleeting through my memory from various times. Of noontides I seem to see only one picture, but a gay one: the hot sun, the stimulating smells from the kitchen, the keen anticipation of the dinner waiting for everybody returning from the fields: my father; the sun-burnt red-bearded bailiff riding with a broad rocking amble on a sweating nag saddled with a high Cossack saddle; the farmhands, who have been mowing with the mowers and now enter the courtyard on top of the cart full of grass and flowers mown together at the field-boundaries, the gleaming scythes lying beside them; and the men who have brought back the horses watched at the pond, their coats shining like glass, their dark tails and manes dripping with water. . . . With what joy and sadness, with what pain, do I now recall how many such noons there were! At one such time I saw my brother Nicholas; also sitting on top of a cart, on grass and flowers, returning from the fields with Sashka, a peasant girl from Novoselki. I had already heard something about them from the servants—something I could not understand, but for some reason took to heart. And now seeing them together on the top of the cart, I was suddenly aware, with a secret rapture, of their beauty, their youth, their happiness. Tall and slender, still no more than a girl, with a delicate pretty face, she sat holding a pitcher, turning aside from my brother, her bare

legs swinging down from the cart, with downcast eyes; he, in a white peaked cap; in a light cambric Russian shirt with unbuttoned collar, sunburnt, clean, youthful, was holding the reins; and he looked at her with shining eyes, telling her something, and smiling joyfully, lovingly. . . .

## IX

I REMEMBER also a couple of trips to Rozhdestvo, to Mass,

Here, of course, everything was unusual and festive: the pock-marked coachman in a yellow silken shirt and corduroy sleeveless jacket, on the box of the tarantass drawn by three horses abreast; father with a tender, clean-shaven chin, and dressed in town fashion, in a nobleman's peaked cap with a red band under which his hair showed, still wet and black, combed in the old-fashioned way in braids running from temples to the eyebrows; the nurse rigged out with heavy pomp; mother in some beautiful, light dress with a multitude of flounces; myself, pomaded, in a silk shirt, with a holiday tenseness in body and soul. . . . Mother would get into the tarantass with apprehension—she always seemed to think that the horses might bolt downhill—whilst father would climb in with a peculiar commanding assurance, saying with a frown somehow even severely: "Well, God speed us!"

In the fields it was already stuffy and hot; the road between the tall still cornfields was narrow, and at places dusty; but that very fact was agreeable—it meant going to Mass—and just as agreeable was the feeling of our superiority, of our nobility, when the coachman outdrove some peasants, also decked out and also going to the feast. In the village this sense was still more vivid, and it mingled with the heart-sinking feeling of the descent down an extremely steep stony slope, and with the novelty and richness of impressions: in the village the peasants' homesteads were large and wealthy, with old oak-trees in the farmyards, with beehives, with bland but independent hosts—tall, robust freeholders; and under the hill, in the shadow of tall willows alive with cawing rooks, meandered a deep black stream smelling in a peculiar cool and rivery way of those willows, and of the dampness of the plain on which they grew, and seemingly of fish. In the village, on the opposite hill which one climbed after crossing a stone bridge washed by the clear water, on the open space before the church—there was a motley crowd: young girls, women, stooping and decrepit, old men in clean peasant tunics and cone-shaped hats; and in the church there was a throng of people and one felt warm with smelly warmth because of that throng, and the blazing candles, and the sun striking through the cupola, and again there came a feeling of secret pride: we were in front of all

the others, we could pray so well, so masterfully and so decorously; after Mass, to us the first the priest handed the cross, smelling of copper, and he bowed almost obsequiously—mother alone was humble and touched, with eyes full of tears of emotion. We rested after Mass in the courtyard of old Danila, a benevolent and bent goblin with grey curls, in a long shirt, with a brown neck resembling cracked cork; and we drank tea with warm cakes and honey piled up like a mountain in a wooden tureen, and all my life I remembered—I felt offended!—that once he took simply with his black rigid fingers a huge piece of flowing, melting amber-like honeycomb, and put it into my mouth. . . .

I already knew that we were poor, that father had “squandered” a lot during the Crimean campaign, had gambled away a lot whilst he lived in Tambov, that he was careless and slovenly in his management of the estate, that he had long ago “sent to the devil” his connections with rich neighbours, and would often say, trying in vain to frighten himself, that our last belongings would soon be under the hammer; I knew that our estate on the other side of the Don had already been auctioned and was no longer ours; yet I have preserved from those days a feeling of contentment and prosperity. I remember the gay dinner hours in our house, the abundance of succulent and plentiful dishes, the greenness, the glitter, and the shadow of the garden

behind the open windows, numerous servants, a great number of hounds pushing their way through the open doors into the house, lots of flies and magnificent butterflies. . . . I remember how sound asleep the whole manor-house was in the long after-dinner hours, whilst, before evening, jam was being made in the garden by whole panfuls. . . . Most often I would run away during those hours to Vyselki, to my Fedkas and Senkas, and thence, together with them, either to Dubnyak—a crooked little wood in a dale close to Vyselki, always dry and sunny, with ponds glistening between the trunks, where we bathed—or to the fields, to the fallow land, where our cattle and the peasants' were guarded by two hoarse, malicious old men and several cheerful herdboys. But I remember also my evening walks with my brothers, who already began taking me with them, and their youthful enthusiastic talk. . . . I recall some marvellous moonlit night, and how unspeakably beautiful, light and clear was the southern sky under the moon, how the sparse azure stars twinkled in the moonlit vault of sky, and my brothers said that all these were worlds unknown to us and perhaps happy and beautiful, that we, too, might probably go there sometime. . . . One of them is long dead and where is he now? Sometimes father slept, on nights like that, not in the house, but in the courtyard, in a cart under the windows: the cart was filled with hay and on the hay his bed was laid. It seemed to me that he ought to be warm

with the moonlight streaming upon him, shining golden on the window-panes, that there could be no greater happiness than to sleep like that and to feel the whole night long, through slumber, that light, the peace and the beauty of the country night, of the familiar neighbouring fields, of the familiar manor. . . .

One event alone had marred the happiness of those days, a terrible and rather majestic event. I well remember the impression it produced on me, but no doubt its secret effect upon my soul was a hundred times stronger and more significant than what I remember. This is what happened: one evening the herdboys who used to bring up the working horses from the field dashed in at full speed into the courtyard of the manor, shouting that Senka had tumbled with his horse at full gallop into the Gap, right to the bottom, into that terrible undergrowth where, it was said, there was something like a slimy funnel leading to Hell. The farmhands, my brothers, my father, all rushed there to try and save him, to drag him out, and the manor was hushed in fear and expectancy: would they save him? But the sun had set, it began to grow dark, then darkness set in—and still there were no news from “there”, and when it came everybody felt still more subdued and crestfallen: both had perished; Senka’s horse had fallen on him and crushed him to death with its weight, floundering and struggling for life, and in the end suffocating too. . . . I remember those

terrible words, "We must warn the police at once and send someone to guard the 'dead body.'" . . . Why were they so terrible, those words, quite new to me, and not even quite comprehensible? Does it mean that I had already known them sometime? And if so, whence was my great perplexity? What was it—this needless and horrible thing that had happened in the world?

## X

It made me wonder, one would not and could not believe it. In that death of a child with a big and heavy horse—so unexpected, so unforeseen, so absurdly accidental—there was something incongruously hideous. But I believe that I should have remembered for ever any other, simple death of which I might have heard in those days.

Men are not all equally sensitive to death. In the life of most, it plays after all but a small part. But there is a category of people who live their whole life through under its sign, who have from early childhood an acute sense of death (most often by reason of the equally acute sense of life). The Archpriest Avvakum, speaking of his own childhood, says: "And I saw once at a neighbour's a dead beast, and having risen that night I wept fairly long about my soul before the holy image, recalling death since I also was to die. . . ." Well, I also am one of these men.



I cannot say for sure, but I have reason to believe that in my early childhood I listened with particular sensitiveness to tales of dark and evil forces existing in the world, and of the dead who were in a way related to these forces. I heard people talk about the "late" uncle, the "late" grandfather, the "late" grandmother, who was a beauty and died young (which gravely upset my notion of grandmothers). I constantly heard it said that the dead were somewhere "in the other world", that is, in some very queer place; I heard mother recite sinister fragments from Zhukovsky's ballads; and listening to them I acquired certain unpleasant and bewildering impressions, a fear of dark rooms, of the garret, of the dreary night hours, of devils and ghosts, in fact of the dead themselves resuscitated and wandering by night.

When and how did I acquire faith in God, the notion and sense of God? I think, together with the notion of death. Death was, alas, somehow associated with Him (and with the ikon-light, with black ikons in silver and gilt casings in mother's bedroom). Likewise associated with Him, of course, was deathlessness. God is in heaven, in the inconceivable altitude and power, in that incomprehensible blue which is above us; He is far away from the earth and reigns over it: this notion had grown into me from my very first days, just as the idea that, in spite of death, every one of us had a soul and that soul was immortal, was located somewhere in the

breast, that it fled from us in our death-hour, whilst on earth it had a trustworthy and faithful keeper in the wonderful and lovely person of a Guardian Angel, whose close presence I felt in those years so vividly, and with such tenderness and gratitude. But nevertheless death remained death, and I already knew and sometimes even felt with dread, that everybody on earth would die—generally speaking not very soon, but in particular at any time, and more especially on the eve of Lent. In our house, late in the evening, everybody would become then suddenly meek, humbly bow to each other, asking one another for forgiveness: they all, as it were, took leave of each other, thinking and dreading lest this night should indeed prove to be their last night on earth. I, too, thought so, and always went to bed with a heavy heart at the possibility of the Last Judgment on that fatal night, of the minatory Second Advent, and worst of all, of the “resurrection of all the dead”. Then Lent would begin—six whole weeks of renunciation of life and all its joys. And then—the Passion Week when our Saviour Himself died. . . .

During Passion Week, in the bustling preparation for the festival, we all still felt sad even though anticipating the coming joy, and we fasted doubly, preparing ourselves for the sacrament—even my father made vain efforts to feel sad and to fast—and I already knew that on Friday, in front of the altar in the Rozhdestvo church, they would place the

thing called Sudarium and which had been so frighteningly described to me, before I had seen it for myself, by my mother and the nurse. On Maundy Thursday when even the raven bathes at dawn, at the edge of ice-holes or in wells, his black young ones—a picture which I saw very vividly in my mind—we went to church for confession and Communion, thereby acquiring for a certain time an almost supernatural purity; but the idea of the Holy Sudarium, that black image of death, oppressed me more and more. By the evening of Holy Saturday our house shone with the utmost cleanliness, both inward and outward, benign and happy, quietly awaiting in its grace the Feast of Christ and His most precious visit. And then the feast would come—in the night from Saturday to Sunday some marvellous transformation was accomplished in the world, and Christ vanquished and triumphed over death. We were not taken to Midnight Mass, but we used to wake up with the sense of the beneficent transformation, so that it seemed there would be room for no more sorrow. Yet it was there, even in Easter. Towards evening, in the silent, rose-coloured spring fields there was heard, at first from afar, then coming nearer and nearer, and repeated with joyous insistence, "*Christ has risen from the dead*",—and after a little there came into sight the "Christ-bearers", hatless young peasants with white girdles, bearing aloft a huge cross, and young girls in white kerchiefs bringing the church ikons in clean towels.

They walked with triumphant singing, entered the courtyard, and at last reaching the porch, paused, joyous and moved, with a sense of a task honourably accomplished; then with brotherly equality they kissed us all with their soft, tender, pleasant young lips, and carefully carried the cross and ikons into the house, into the hall, where in the fine twilight of the spring sunset the ikon-lamp gleamed in one corner; they set the ikons on the tables, drawn together under the ikon-lamp and covered with beautiful new table-cloths, and the cross on a chair in a sack of rye. How lovely it was! But alas, it was also a little sorrowful and frightening. Everything was pleasing and comforting, the ikon-lamp burned so tenderly, so softly, so peacefully in the greenish spring dusk. And yet it all had in it something of the church, something divine, and so again connected with the sense of death and sorrow. And more than once I saw the sorrowful rapture with which my mother would pray before that corner, remaining alone in the hall and kneeling before the ikon-lamp, the cross, and the ikons. . . . What was her grief? And why did she grieve all her life long, even when there seemed to be no reason, praying for hours at night, sometimes weeping even on the finest summer days, sitting by the window and gazing into the fields? The "young messenger" was bringing her a longed for message from her beloved son, and she wept. . . . Why? Because her soul was full of love for everything and everybody, and

especially for us, her own kin, and because everything passed and would pass for ever and beyond recall, because the world was a place of partings, of illnesses, of sorrows, of unfulfillable dreams and unrealisable hopes, of unutterable, or unuttered and unshared feelings—and of death. . . .

I say this to explain that it was not Senka, of course, who gave me the first notion of death. Even before that I knew, and to some extent felt it. But it was through Senka that I first really became aware of its actuality, of the fact that it had at last affected us too. I realized then for the first time that sometimes it actually invades the world as a cloud invades the sun, suddenly depreciating all our "deeds and things", robbing us of our interest in them, of the sense of the legitimacy and meaning of their existence, covering everybody and everything with grief and weariness. On that memorable evening it rose from behind the farinyard, from behind the cornbarn, from the direction of the Gap. And long, long afterwards I imagined that something very dark, painful, and even ghastly, existed there, and whatever I thought, whatever I saw was associated in my mind with Senka. I was tormented by futile questions. What happened to him after he was crushed to death? What is he now? And why did he perish on that precise night? I felt helplessly sad at the thought that he would not be with us to see the coming autumn. . . .

But days passed by, the memory of Senka began

gradually to fade away and at last faded completely—without leaving traces, and for ever, as it then seemed. And my life continued all the time to grow richer and fuller.

## XI

DAYS went by, shaping themselves into weeks, and then months; autumn followed summer, and winter autumn, and spring winter. . . . But what can I tell of them? I only know that all this was so. But here again I remember very little—only a few details, sometimes very important, sometimes minor, remembered for no earthly reason. I remember also something general: the fact that I had already imperceptibly entered upon the conscious phase of my life, and that those years had given me strikingly varied impressions: many bright ones, but also many very sombre, sharp, and cruel ones.

I remember: once, dashing into mother's bedroom, I suddenly saw myself in a small looking-glass in an oval frame which stood facing the door—and for a moment I stumbled: there, looking at me with astonishment and even with a certain fear, was a slender nimble boy, already fairly tall, in a brown Russian shirt, black lustrine knickerbockers, and worn but well-fitting goat-skin boots. Of course, I had often seen myself in a mirror before, but without remembering, without noticing it. Why did I notice it now? Evidently because I was surprised and even slightly frightened by the change which

for some time—perhaps in the course of one summer as often happens—had taken place in me and which at last I suddenly discovered. I don't know exactly at what time of year it happened, nor how old I was then. I believe it happened in autumn, judging by the fact that, so far as I recollect, the sunburn on the boy's face in the mirror was pale, such as it is when it is going off, fading away, and that I must have been about seven years of age; with more precision I know this—that I liked the boy for his slimness, his beautiful curly hair, faded by the sun, the bright pleasant expression of his face—and I know that there was a somewhat startled amazement. Why? Evidently because I suddenly perceived (as a stranger) my own attractiveness—in that discovery there was even, goodness knows why, something sad—my already fairly tall stature, my thinness; and my bright, intelligent expression; in fact, I suddenly saw that I was no longer a child, I felt vaguely that some change, perhaps for the worse, had come into my life. . . .

And so, in reality, it was. About this time the prevailing recollection of the happy hours ceased—which in itself meant a good deal, of course,—and this coincided also with certain quite new discoveries, ideas and feelings which I acquired on earth. Soon afterwards I made the acquaintance of a man remarkable in his kind who came into my life and with whom I started my studies; I underwent my first grave illness; I experienced the

death of Nadya and then the death of my grandmother. . . . And many, many other things as well.

## XII

THE frock-coated man who had suddenly made his appearance in our courtyard one icy and gloomy spring day, appeared once more in our house. Just when, I don't remember; but appear he did. And he turned out to be a really hapless man, but of a quite peculiar kind, in that he was not merely wretched, but had created his own misery by his own will, longed for it, and bore it with an almost savage cheerfulness, even rejoicing in it,—in a word, he turned out to belong to that dreadful species of Russian people which, of course, I came to understand properly only later, in my mature years. His name was Baskakov; he came from a wealthy and high-born family; he was clever and gifted, consequently could have lived, if not better, at least not worse than many others. It was not for nothing that he was thin, stooping, hook-nosed, dark-faced "like a devil", it was said; his temper was wild and violent: when still at the Lyceum he fled with curses from home after some quarrel with his father; then, after his father's death, he was so infuriated with his brother over the division of the property that he tore up the deed of partition, spat in his brother's face, shouting that if things were such he would share nothing with such a scoundrel, and would not accept a single farthing for himself, and



once more—and this time for good—he slammed behind him the door of his home. With that his wandering life began: in no place, in no house could he get on, even for a few months. Nor did he get on with us at first: soon after his first appearance in our courtyard he and my father nearly came to blows. But the second time a miracle occurred—after a certain time Baskakov declared that he would stay with us for ever; and he stayed with us fully three years, until I was sent to school. He even admitted that, though in general he felt for his fellow-men nothing but contempt and hatred, he had conceived a warm affection for us all, especially for me. He became my tutor, and after a time I, in my turn, came to like him; and this was the source of many very complex and strong feelings which I experienced in my close contact with him.

The strong impressionableness which I inherited not only from my father and mother, but also from my grandfathers and great grandfathers, men of that highly original type of which the Russian educated class was once composed, was an inborn quality in me. Baskakov contributed much to its development—mainly involuntarily, of course. As a tutor in the usual sense of the word, he was no good at all. He soon taught me to read and write with the aid of a Russian translation of *Don Quixote*, which happened to have found its way into our house among other casual books; but what was to be done further, he knew not and did not really bother

to know. With my mother, towards whom, by the way, he always behaved with respect and delicacy, he usually spoke French. She advised him to teach me also to read French. This he did rapidly and very willingly, but again went no further: he ordered from the town some textbooks, which I had to read for admission to the first form in school, and simply began making me learn them by heart. As it turned out his great influence upon me was exercised in quite a different field. In general, he led a very secluded and savage life; sometimes he would be extraordinarily gay, agreeable, affable, talkative, witty, and even brilliant—an inexhaustible and masterful storyteller; but for the most part he kept a caustic silence, always thinking something, smiling sardonically, mumbling malignantly, and endlessly pacing up and down the rooms or the courtyard with quick steps, swinging evenly and rapidly on his thin, crooked legs. At such times he would break off any attempt to talk to him, either by a curt, stinging politeness or simply by rudeness. But even then he would be completely transfigured on seeing me. He would at once hurry towards me, kiss my head, put his arm round my shoulder and either lead me into the fields or the garden, or sit with me in some quiet corner of the house, and start telling me some story, reading something aloud, kindling the most contradictory feelings and ideas within me.

He was, I repeat, an excellent storyteller—he related always enthusiastically, precisely and vividly

impersonating his characters with gestures and swift changes of voice. One could also lose oneself in listening to him when he read aloud—always, as was his habit, screwing up his left eye, holding the book in his left hand and at a great distance. And that clash of feelings and ideas which he kindled in me was due to the fact that the stories which he generally chose to tell, without in the least minding my age, were all the most bitter and biting, it seemed, among his experiences, bearing witness to human meanness and cruelty; while for his readings he chose something heroic and exalted, expressive of the fine and noble passions of the human soul; and as I listened to him I would now be burning with indignation against men and with poignant tenderness for himself, who had suffered so much at their hands, and now be panting and breathless with a sense of gladness. He had eyes like a crayfish, short-sighted and always bloodshot, of a tery-brown colour, and the expression of his face struck one by its tenseness. Whenever he walked, or rather ran, about, his dry greyish hair and the lapels of his invariable frock-coat, extremely old-fashioned, floated and flapped about. "Not wishing to be a burden upon anyone"—this was a mania with him—he smoked (and continuously) only the cheapest cigarettes, slept in summer in a barn, and in winter in the footmen's room (long given up for lack of footmen), and as regards food he seemed to be firmly convinced that the idea that people must

cat was mere prejudice: at table he was interested only in vodka, and in mustard and vinegar. In truth, everyone wondered how he kept alive. . . .

He told me about the violent collisions he had had in his life with "scoundrels"; about Moscow where he used to study; about the dense, bear-infested forests beyond the Volga where at one time he had long wandered about. He read with me *Don Quixote*, the *Odyssey*, Russian folk-epics and fairytales, Gogol (who struck me particularly by his *A Terrible Revenge*), the review *The Universal Traveller*, some book called *Lands and Peoples*, *Robinson Crusoe*. . . . He painted in water-colours—and for a long time captivated me by a passionate dream to become a painter. For a long time I would tremble from head to foot at the very sight of a box of paints, daub paper from morn to night, and stand for hours looking at flowers, sunlight, and shadows, and at that marvellous blueness of the sky, bordering on mauve, which shows on a hot day facing the sun, among the tree-tops bathing as it were in that blueness; and I became for ever imbued with a deep sense and consciousness of the truly divine meaning and significance of the colours of earth and sky. Surveying all that life has given me, I see this as one of the most important results. That rich mauve blueness, showing among branches and foliage, I shall remember even on my dying day. . . .

But, then, I shall probably also remember many other things I lived through during those days.

## XIII

ON the wall of my father's study there hung an old hunting knife. Sometimes I saw him draw its white blade from the sheath and rub it idly with the flap of his loose jacket. Afterwards I did the same myself. What voluptuous joy thrilled me then at the mere touch of that smooth, cold, sharp steel! I longed to kiss it, to press it to my heart—and then to stab something, to thrust it in up to the hilt. My father's razor was also of steel, and even sharper, yet I hardly paid any heed to it, whereas the sight of any steel weapon excites me even to this day—and what is the source of these feelings in me? As a child I was kind and tender-hearted, and yet once I slaughtered with real delight a young rook with a broken wing. The courtyard, I remember, was deserted; indoors likewise, for some reason, all was empty and quiet, and then suddenly I saw a large and very black bird hurrying clumsily somewhere, sideways; with its drooping wing unfolded, it sauntered over the grass towards the granaries. I dashed into the study, grasped the dagger, and jumped out of the window. . . . The rook, when I overtook him, suddenly stood still; with terror in his wild gleaming eye, he flung himself aside, pressed close to the ground, bristled up fiercely and lifting up his wide-open beak, and scowling, he hissed and croaked with anger, evidently resolved to fight me for his life. . . . The murder

I then committed for the first time in my life proved for me a real event, for several days after it I was out of sorts, secretly imploring, not only God, but the whole world, to forgive me my great and dastardly sin for the sake of my soul's great torment! But all the same I did then kill that wretched rook who had so desperately fought me and drawn blood from my hands, and I took great pleasure in the killing of him.

And how often did I climb with Baskakov to the garret where, tradition said, some sabre of grandfather or great-grandfather was lying about! We climbed there up very steep stairs, in semi-darkness, stooping. In the same manner we made our way further, treading on beams, girders, piles of rubbish and cinders. It was warm and stuffy there, in the way proper to attics, smelling of cold smoke, ashes, stoves. In the world there was sky, sun, expanse, and here it was twilight, something stifled, tedious, somnolent. The free wind from the fields was sounding about us on the roof, and here its noise came muffled, turning into some other sound, witch-like and sinister. . . . The twilight grew gradually lighter, we turned round the flue of the chimney, and in the light coming through the dormer-window we kept wandering to and fro, looking under the beams, under the dusty rafters that lay slantwise over them, digging among the cinders, now grey, now violet, according to the spot, to the light. . . . If only we could find that

fairy sabre! I think I should have choked with joy! Yet what good was it to me? Whence came my fierce, aimless love for it?

But then everything else in the world was aimless, existed goodness knows why, and already I felt this.

Tired with fruitless search we would rest. The queer man who shared that search with me, the man who for some reason had utterly ruined his life and was aimlessly dragging it about the world, the only person who understood my pointless dreams and passions, would sit down on the girder, roll a cigarette, and thinking thoughts of his own, mumble something angrily while I stood looking through the dormer-window. It was now almost daylight in the garret, especially near the window, and the noise of the wind did not seem so sinister. Nevertheless we felt there something apart, and the manor also was a thing apart, and I imagined it, and its peaceful flowing life, as a stranger. In the stables the swallows were still twittering as of old, though the coachman no longer slept there, and there were only three horses—we were growing poorer and poorer, and sometimes even pawned the ikon frames in town. . . . The farm hands were in the fields, ploughing, turning up the fallow land for a second time. . . . The cook was feeding chickens by the threshold of the servants' cottage. . . . The trough in the middle of the courtyard, already forgotten by us, was being overgrown by grass.

. . . Olya was playing in the nursery with Nadya. . . . My mother and the nurse were doing some work sitting in the nursery by an open window. . . . My father was away on a hunting visit to the manor of a certain Vasily Petrovich, near Voronezh. My eldest brother, who was spending his vacation with us, was lying under an apple-tree in the orchard, reading a book by a man called Herzen; whilst Nicholas, who had definitely abandoned school, was probably in Novoselki with Sashka or with his friends, the Novoselki lads. . . . And I thought (or rather felt) vaguely, "I am fond of all this. It is all somehow a little sad, and yet very nice. But what is the good of it all, what is it all for?"

Straight beneath me, in the sunlight, billowed the grey-green and dark-green tops of the garden-trees, so strange to view from above. The sparrows strewed them with lively chirruping; shadowy inside, their tops glistened with a glassy glitter under the sunlight, and as I looked at them I thought—what was 'it for? Probably only for the sake of its being so lovely. Beyond the garden and the adjacent fields, right on the horizon, Baturino was showing blue, like a distant forest; and there, heaven knows why, my grandmother, my mother's mother, had been living for eighty years in her old-world manor, in a house with a very high roof and coloured window-panes. To the left, everything shimmered in the hot haze; there, beyond the meadows, was Novoselki,



that is the willows, the kitchen-gardens, the scant peasants' farmyards, and a row of miserable cottages down a long and always deserted street. . . . Why did they all exist there—hens, calves, dogs, water-casks, shanties, pot-bellied babies, toothy women, beautiful young girls, shaggy, dull peasants? And why did my brother Nicholas go thither almost every day to see Sashka? Only because for some reason he liked to contemplate her kind, modest face, the nice circular cut of the white calico shirt round her neck, her tall figure and bare feet. . . . That cut I also liked, and it also called forth something languorous and insoluble: one wanted to do something with it, but what in particular, or why, one could not understand.

Yes, in those days the sabre hidden in the garret fascinated me most. But time and again I would also remember Sashka, for whom once, when she came to the manor and was standing by the porch with bowed head saying something shyly to my mother, I suddenly felt a particularly sweet and pining feeling—the first flash of the most incomprehensible and most fascinating of all human feelings. . . .

#### XIV

*Don Quixote* by which I learned to read, the illustrations in that book, and Baskakov's stories about the age of knights made my imagination riotously active. I could not rid my head of castles, crenellated walls

and towers, portcullises, cuirasses, vizors, swords and arquebuses, fights and tournaments. Dreaming of the stroke of the falchion on the shoulder of a kneeling youth with flowing hair, fatal like the first communion, I felt pins and needles all over my body. In the letters of Alexey Tolstoy one finds these lines: "*How nice it is in Wartburg! There are even instruments of the 12th century. And just as your heart beats up in the Asiatic world so mine started thumping and jumping in that knights' world, and I know that I formerly belonged to it.*" I think I also did. I have visited in my life nearly all the most famous castles of Europe, and strolling about them I wondered more than once how could I, being a child but little different to any child from Vyselki, how could I gaping at the pictures in the books and listening to a half-crazy vagabond smoking cheap cigarettes, feel so rightly the ancient life of those castles and so accurately imagine them? Yes, I used to belong sometime to that world, and had even been an ardent Roman Catholic. Neither the Acropolis of Athens, nor Baalbek, nor Thebes, nor Paestum, nor Saint Sophia, nor the old churches in the Russian Kremlins are, to my mind, even now comparable with Gothic cathedrals. How struck I was by the organ when, in my years of adolescence, I first entered a Roman Catholic church, though it was but an ordinary Polish church in Vitebsk! It seemed to me then that there were no more wonderful sounds on earth than those menacing, loud roars, booming and thundering,

and amid and athwart them, in the wide-open heavens, the vociferating, exultant angelic voices. . . .

To Don Quixote and the knights' castles succeeded the seas, frigates, Robinson Crusoe, the world of ocean and tropics. To that world I no doubt belonged at some time. The illustrations in *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Universal Traveller*, as well as the large yellowed map of the world with the great lacunae of the South Seas and the dots of the Polynesian islands, fascinated me for the rest of my life. Those narrow canoes, the naked men with bows and javelins, the coconut groves, the blades of the huge leaves and a primitive hut underneath them—all this I felt to be as near and familiar as if I had just left that hut, as if only yesterday I had been sitting beside it in the heavenly quietude of a sleepy afternoon filled with tropical glitter and torrid stillness. What sweet, bright visions, what a real nostalgia did I experience looking at those pictures! Pierre Loti tells of the "disturbing and miraculous" meaning which the word "Colonies" had for him, in his childhood. But then he says: "*Il y avait une quantité de choses des colonies chez cette petite Antoinette: un perroquet, des oiseaux de toutes couleurs dans une volière, des collections de coquilles et d'insectes. Dans les tiroirs de sa maman, j'avais vu de bizarres colliers de graines pour parfumer; dans les greniers on trouvait des peaux de bêtes, des sacs singuliers, des caisses sur lesquelles se lisaient encore des adresses de villes*

*des Antilles*. . . .” And what could there be like that in Kanmenka?

In a book called *Lands and Peoples*, printed on heavy pink paper, there were coloured illustrations, very florid and no doubt quite tawdry. I remember two in particular: one represented a date-palm, a camel and an Egyptian pyramid, and the other—a coconut palm, very slender and tall, the upward-sloping line of a tall spotted giraffe stretching forward, to its feathery top, his feminine squint-eyed little head, his fine sting-like tongue, and a thick-maned lion springing through the air with taut limbs straight for the giraffe’s neck. All this—the camel, the date-palm, the pyramid, the giraffe under the coconut tree, the lion—was painted against a background of two screaming colours: the glaring, rich, unrelieved blue of the sky, and the bright yellow of the sands. And, heavens! what torrid parchedness, what blaze of sun, did I not only see, but feel with all my being, as I gazed on that blue and that yellow, and gasped with a really celestial delight! Amid those Tambov fields, under that Tambov sky, over a gaudy book, I recollected so vividly all that I had seen and absorbed once upon a time, in my former, immemorial lives, that afterwards in Egypt, in Nubia, I could only say “Yes yes, this is all just as I first ‘remembered’ thirty years ago!”

We had at home still another book with coloured prints, one of Russian fairy tales. But the old places and attic chambers, the kremlins with domes of

countless churches, the fair ladies in national head-dresses, the valiant youths of comely appearance in doublets with stiff collars, in yellow and green boots with upturned toes, touched me but little. Wasn't it because I secretly knew and felt that all this was a quite recently invented Russia? The obviously fairy-tale world was a different thing: the dense black forest in an unknown realm, the lonesome cottage mounted on hen's legs, the island of Buyan within a circle of blue sky, and an immemorial green oak on it, the King-Maiden in the celestial azure on a flying carpet. . . . This spoke of the Eternal, of the everlastingly beautiful, and answered the deepest yearnings of the soul, whereon it left uneffaceable traces.

## XV

PUSHKIN, some of whose poetry mother used to recite to Olya and myself, struck me by his wizardly prologue to *Ruslan and Ludmila* :

A verdant oak on curvèd sea-shore,  
A golden chain upon that oak . . .

What a trifle it may seem—a few good, let us even say excellent, uncommonly excellent lines. And yet they poisoned me for the rest of my life, they permeated my whole self, became one of the greatest joys I knew on earth. What nonsense it would seem—some curved sea-shore that has never existed anywhere, some “learned” cat that for no earthly

reason came to be there and—heaven knows why—is chained to the oak-tree, some wood-goblin, water sprites and “on unknown tracks the footprints of unfamiliar beasts”. But then evidently the point was in its being nonsense, an intoxicated vision, something totally absurd, unreal, not anything reasonable or real; its effect sprang from the poet himself having been under the spell of some unreasonable creature, someone intoxicated and versed in intoxications: how priceless in itself is that evocation of circling, continuous movements (“by day, by night, the learned cat keeps walking round upon his chain”), and these “unknown” tracks and the “footprints of unfamiliar beasts”—the footprints only, not the beasts themselves!—the simplicity, preciseness, vividness of the opening (the curved sea-shore, the verdant oak, the golden chain), and then—the dream, the spell, the variety, the confusion, something floating and changing, like the early morning mists and clouds of some hidden country of the north, of dense forests by the sea now instilled with such magic:

There wood and dale are thronged with visions,  
At dawn the waves will break with plashing  
Against the sandy desert shore,  
And thirty knights, all fair and handsome,  
Come forth in turn from limpid waters . . .

Mother knew by heart, and sometimes recited to Olya and myself whole pages of Pushkin's poetry,

in her sing-song, dreamy, old-fashioned manner, with a pretty, somewhat languid smile on her lips. Most often—probably, always remembering her school years as she did so—she would recite *Ruslan and Ludmila*. But I was struck, I say, only by the “Prologue” to this. It was the same with Gogol, whom Baskakov read aloud to me so well, with such ardour, even though a little theatrically: a great impression was produced on me by *Old-World Landowners*, *A Terrible Revenge*, *Taras Bulba*, but again only by certain passages and by their general lofty tone and meaning. What unforgettable passages they are! How marvellously they still ring in my ears, having from childhood irrevocably entered my inner self, endeared to me for the rest of my life, having turned out to be among those most important things which went to the making of my “vital substance” (to use Gogol’s own expression). These “singing doors”, this “lovely” summer rain which sounds “luxuriously” in the garden, these wild cats dwelling in the forest beyond the garden where “the old tree trunks, hidden by the dense hazelnut underwood, were like the feathery feet of pigeons. . . .” When I now read my Gogol, he certainly enraptures me, but only those familiar lines really bring me back to life; up to a point everything sounds beautifully, yet it all sounds as if the soft pedal were down; and then I light upon a passage which once upon a time entered my soul—and instantly everything is changed: it is as if I had

released the pedal, and suddenly everything begins to ring out, in a quite different, singing tone:

"There was a bustle and an uproar in a quarter of Kiev: the Esaul Gorobets was celebrating his son's wedding. A great many people had come as guests to the wedding. . . ."

"The Esaul's adopted brother, Danilo Burulbash, came too, with his young wife Katerina and his twelve-months-old son, from beyond the Dnieper. . . . The guests marvelled at the fair face of the young wife Katerina, her eyebrows black as German velvet . . . her boots with silver heels; but they marvelled still more that her old father had not come with her. . . ."

And further:

"There was a soft light all over the earth: the moon had come up from behind the mountain. It covered the steep bank of the Dnieper as with a costly Damask muslin, white as snow, and the shadows drew back further into the pine forest. A boat, hollowed out of an oak tree, was floating in the Dnieper. Two lads were sitting in the bow; their black Cossack caps were cocked on one side, and the drops flew in all directions from their oars like sparks from a flint. . . ."

And here Katerina is talking to her husband; wiping with a kerchief the face of the child sleeping in her arms: "that kerchief had been embroidered by her with leaves and fruits in red silk" (the very same that I see, remember and love all my life



long!) Here, she "sat silent looking down into the slumbering river; and the wind ruffled the water into eddies and all Dnieper shimmered with silver like a wolf's skin in the night. . . ."

Again I am left marvelling: how could I then, in Kamenka, visualize with such precision, and call to my mind all these pictures? I saw them as plainly as I saw the walls of my nursery. And is it not strange that not a single trait has changed in them since, although a hundred times I have seen, with my own eyes the moonlit Dnieper? More broadly, how well my child soul already discriminated and guessed what was good and what was bad, what better and what worse, what it wanted and what it did not want! Towards some things I was cold and unmindful, others I grasped gladly, passionately, to remember and retain them for ever—and here, more often than not, I acted with an amazingly unerring flair and taste. Many of my tastes and faculties have since changed, many I have developed anew, as of course is quite natural. But how can it be explained that many others have remained just as they were in childhood, that then already they had the same force which they have now? Evidently we do not quite realize how little, after all, we change from birth to the grave. . . .

"They all go out. A thatched roof came into sight behind the mountain: it was Danilo's ancestral home. Beyond it was another mountain; and then

the open plain, and there you might travel a hundred miles and not see a single Cossack. . . .”

Yes, this was what I needed!

“Danilo’s house lay between two mountains in a narrow valley that ran down to the Dnieper. It was a low pitched house like a humble Cossack’s hut and there was only one large room in it. . . . There were oak shelves running round the walls at the top. Bowls and cooking pots were piled upon them. Among them were silver goblets and drinking cups mounted in gold, gifts or booty brought from the war. Lower down hung costly swords, muskets, arquebuses, spears. . . . At the bottom of the wall were smooth-planed oak benches; beside them, in front of the oven-step, the cradle hung on cords from a ring fixed in the ceiling. The whole floor of the room was beaten hard and plastered with clay. On the benches slept Danilo and his wife; on the oven-step the old serving-woman; the child played and was lulled to sleep in the cradle; and on the floor the serving-men slept in a row. . . .”

All the piled up horrors in the wonderful tale did not so much as touch my soul in childhood. But that hut. . . And then—the epilogue:

“In the days of Stepan, prince of Sedmigrad . . . there lived two Cossacks . . . Ivan and Petro. . . .”

*A Terrible Revenge* awakened in my soul that lofty feeling which is inherent in every soul and will

live for ever—the feeling of the most sacred lawfulness of vengeance, the most sacred necessity of the final triumph of good over evil, and the utter ruthlessness with which evil is punished when its time comes. This feeling means, doubtless, a craving for God, means faith in Him. In the moment when His triumph and His just punishment are fulfilled, it throws man into a sweet terror and trembling and finds its climax in a storm of ecstasy, seemingly baleful, but which is in reality an access of our supreme love both for God and for our fellow-beings. . . .

## XVI

THUS began my school years, during which I lived with extreme intensity, not in the real life that surrounded me, but in that into which it was transfigured for me, and most of all in the fictitious life.

The real life was scant and simple.

I was born and grew up, as I said, in an absolutely open country, such as cannot even be imagined by a European brought up in France, Germany, or Italy, on the shores of the Atlantic, or the Mediterranean, in the Alps or Pyrenees, and which even to myself now seems extraordinarily strange, after all that I have lived through in the course of the half-century of my infinitely varied life, which has left me absolutely nothing of the past, so absolutely

nothing that at times it is even amazing and terrible. True, a vast expanse, with neither obstacles nor boundaries, surrounded me: where, in fact, did our manor end, and where began that boundless plain into which it merged? But then I saw only the plain and the sky, and my notions—real, not fairy ones—about the populousness of villages and the beauties of nature did not extend beyond Rozhdestvo.

Colonies! I knew only Baev's "colonial" shop in Rozhdestvo. To me everything "colonial" was confined to cinnamon, with which the Easter curd-cake used to be spiced during the Passion Week; to the black glistening sweet-pods whose mawkish taste I learned at the fairs in Rozhdestvo; and to the labels ("sherry", "madeira") on the bottles in fine wiry nets with which I amused myself, stretching them this way and that, and which began again to appear more and more frequently at home, because my father was again taking more and more to drink. It was in Rozhdestvo, too, that I saw the supreme splendour—in the church. To an eye accustomed only to cornfields, grass, field-roads, tar-smelling carts, smoky cottages, bast-shoes, hempen shirts; to an ear accustomed to quietude, to the singing of larks, the cheeping of chickens, the cackle of hens,—the deep cupola with the menacing white-haired God of Sabaoth spreading his hands wide over the lilac puffs of clouds and over His own undulating robes, the golden ikonostasis, the ikons

in golden frames, the slender wax candles, crowded slantwise before the day's ikon, blazing hot in a golden bonfire of light and melting each other, the loud discordant chant of deacon and sexton, the vestments of priest and deacon, their invocations, the recital in an exalted, rather obscure language, the bowings and the burning of incense, its spiced smoke rising thickly from the thurible adroitly swung and jingling with its silver chains—all this seemed regal and splendid, exalting one's spirit with festal solemnity. . . .

Moreover, I grew up amid that dire impoverishment of the gentry which likewise can never be grasped by a European to whom the Russian passion for self-destruction in all its forms is utterly alien. That passion was characteristic not only of the gentry. For consider the Russian peasant, who, after all, in his large expanses, possessed riches such as a European peasant never dreamed of, and justified his idleness, his sloth, his dreaminess, and his general fecklessness by the mere fact that the Government had been loath to deprive his neighbour the squire, who was every year growing poorer, of an extra acre of land. Why indeed was *he* dragging out this miserable existence? Why did the covetousness of the grasping merchants now and again alternate with wild fits of squandering accompanied by curses on that very covetousness, by bitter drunken tears about one's own ungodliness, and with feverish dreams of deliberately becoming a Job, a vagabond,

an idiot? And why, generally, did Russia meet the fate she did, sinking before our eyes with such miraculous rapidity?

Among my relations and those who were near to me, my mother alone could perhaps be understood, with her tears, her sorrow, her fastings and prayers, her longing—in which, however, there was nothing morbid—to stand aloof from life: her soul lived in constant and sublime religious tension, she thought God's Kingdom to be not of this world, and believed with all her being that the lovely, brief, and sad life on earth was but a preparation for another, everlasting and happy. And all the others—our dissipated neighbours, relations, my father, Baskakov? What a mess Baskakov had made of his life, I have already mentioned. And what did our father do with himself and his fortune, he, so strong, noble, magnanimous, yet careless as a bird? And we ourselves, the young heirs of the former glory of the Arseniev family and of the miserable remnants of its past wealth? My brother Nicholas, for the sake of Sashka and the charms of country indolence, left school, and took so little interest in the estate that he hardly knew exactly how many acres of land we owned. My brother George spent all his days in reading Lavrovs and Chernyshevskys. The auspices under which I grew up can be judged by what follows. One day Nicholas began painting my future to me. "Well, there you are," he said jokingly, "we are certainly ruined

already, and when you grow up you'll take a job somewhere like the post-office in town; you'll drudge; you'll marry; you'll have children; you'll save a bit and buy a small house, a cow——"; and suddenly I felt so vividly all the horror and the ignominy of such a future, that I burst into bitter tears. . . .

## XVII

THE last year of our life in Kamenka was very memorable to me.

First of all, I underwent my first serious illness: in other words, I learned for the first time that astonishing thing which people usually just call "illness," which in reality is an unconsummated death, a crazy journey into certain realms of beyond, that never leaves us unscathed. I fell ill in the late autumn. What happened to me? I felt a sudden weakening of all my mental and bodily forces, a miraculous change that occurs at such moments in all of the five human senses—in sight, taste, hearing, smell, touch; I felt a sudden loss of the wish to live, I mean to move, drink, eat, be merry or sad, or even to love anyone, not excluding those dearest to my heart; I felt as if I were removed to a totally different sphere, where the body is shaken by unspeakable heat and fever with a particular, even as it were, preternatural force; and then would come whole days and nights of a kind of non-existence, broken only by occasional

delirium, by dreams, by visions, mostly ugly and absurdly complex, seeming to focus in themselves the whole of the physical crudity of earthly life, which, in disintegration, in a fierce struggle with itself, perishes amid something feverish and flaming which has, no doubt, contributed to the human notion of hellish tortures. How well I remember those endless nights when I was beginning to conquer death! But my skirmishes with it still went on, as I made desperate attempts to grasp life that still evaded me—and at times I saw, now my mother like a huge white ghost, now, instead of the bedroom, a dark and gloomy barn, where a candle set on the floor behind the head of the bed made thousands of loathsome figures, faces, beasts, plants, move tremulously in its flaming waves. My soul was filled with unearthly lucidity, with quietude, with meek joy, and tenderness, long after I had returned to earth, from my descent into hell, to the simple, lovely, familiar vale of earth. Heaven knows why in those days I took such particular delight in eating black bread, the mere smell of which enraptured me, and which through the simplicity and weakness of the country folk was hardly ever refused me. . . .

Then Nadya died—a couple of months after my illness, after Christmas. For me that Christmas passed in strange joyousness. My father drank, and every day from morning till night there was revelling under our roof; the house was full of guests,



small squires of the neighbourhood wearing *vengherkas* and *poddiovkas*; and the feeling of happiness as I well remember—never left me for a moment, though somehow it was provokingly bound up with the sounds of the piano on which our mad Aunt Varia, who was staying with us, kept endlessly strumming. My mother wept, saying that now that father had taken again to drinking “everything would go to the dogs”; yet she, too, was happy: her supreme joy had always been in the time when our whole family was gathered together, I mean when my brother George came for his vacation, as he did that Christmas. Then suddenly, amid all that crude rejoicing, Nadya, who just before had been so briskly stamping all over the house on her firm little feet, making everybody admire her blue eyes, her shouts and laughter, fell ill. Days passed, the holidays were over, the guests ebbed away, my brother went off, and still she lay unconscious, burning with fever, and in the nursery there was always the same thing: the windows curtained, the half-light, the lamp burning before the ikon. . . . Why should God have chosen just Nadya, the joy of the whole house? Everybody felt depressed, dejected; even my father kept hopelessly waving his hand, trying for some reason to deprive himself and everyone else of all hope. And yet no one expected that this anguish would come to such a sudden climax late one evening, with the exclamation of the nurse, who suddenly

opened the dining-room door with the terrible news that Nadya was "expiring." Yes, that staggering word "expiring" first struck me, utterly defenceless as I was, late one winter evening amid the desolation of dark snowy fields, in a lonely snowbound manor. At night, when the wild confusion which thereupon seized the whole house had subsided, when order (some new and ghastly order) was restored, I saw, lying still on the table in the hall in the sepulchral light of the ikon-lamp, a dainty doll with bloodless, inanimate face, and black eyelashes almost shut; and already there was in her something that called churches to mind, something saintly. . . . Never in my life has there been a more terrible, a more magical night.

In the spring my grandmother died. It was wonderful May weather; my mother was sitting by an open window, in a black dress, thin and pale, sewing something. Suddenly from behind the barn emerged a peasant on horseback, a stranger, gaily shouting something to her. Mother opened her eyes wide and, with a light and apparently joyous exclamation, tapped the window-sill with her palm. . . . The life of the manor was once more suddenly and brusquely checked. Once more there arose on all sides a peculiar bustling—alas already familiar to me—the farmhands rushed to harness the horses, my mother and father—to dress. . . . Us, the children, thank God, they did not take with them. . . .

This death did not make such a terrible impression on me: by that spring I was rather immune against death. I was then recovering from the second grave crisis—that into which Nadya precipitated me and which had either steeled or broken my soul, I am not sure which.

For a long time Nadya's death, the first which I saw with my own eyes, deprived me of the sense of life—life which I had just come to realise! I suddenly recognised that I, too, was mortal, that to me, too, this strange and terrible thing which happened to Nadya might happen at any moment, and that generally speaking all earthly, living, material, bodily things are very unreliable, unfailingly subject to death, to putrefaction, to that purplish blackness which had covered Nadya's lips by the time her body was taken from the house. And my terrified soul, with something like a deep sense of disgrace, as if somehow offended, turned to God for help and salvation. Soon all my thoughts and feelings merged into one—into a secret prayer to Him, a constant unspoken request to spare me, to show me the way forth from the mortal tent which had been spread over and around me and over all the world. But God was silent; in His stead spoke that dolorous experience, the only one leading to salvation, which man has learned on his earthly path, and which has been legalized and sanctioned by the wisest among us—by God's Saints: to them God had sometime answered,

to them He had revealed Himself, for the chastisement of the flesh, for the renunciation of the whole carnal world, for the undivided love of Him alone, He had taught them to the end, loved and laid to rest in His everlastingness, quite alien to the world and in everything opposed to it. My mother under my eyes was following them—passionately praying day and night, asking “to save and to spare, not to deprive of the Lord’s Kingdom,” seeking both God directly and their help, their protection and intercession. Our nurse seeing my craving, pointed out to me the same refuge:

“One must pray to God more assiduously, dearie. Look how the saints have prayed, fasted, tormented themselves so that God should help them. It is a sin to cry about Nadenka, one must rejoice for her,” she would say weeping, “she is now in Heaven, with the angels . . .”

Thus I entered into one more world, wonderful and new to me: I set about reading greedily, endlessly, penny lives of saints and martyrs, which were brought to me from town by the cobbler Pavel of Vyselki, who often went there to buy materials for his craft. Oddly enough whilst in all the peasants’ cottages in Vyselki it was dry, warm, and, in spite of all, cosy and pleasant, with Pavel alone it was dreary, infinitely dreary—he would sit everlastingly by his little window with a dull leaden glimmer on his emaciated, green-and-yellow face, in a dirty rough apron, stooping and

tearing the waxen thread over a soleless shoe turned upside down, with his yellow oily curls dropping over it; with Pavel alone it smelt, not only of leather and sour glue, but also of damp and mildew. And so the smell of mildew came always to be associated in my mind with those thin booklets printed in large characters which I read and re-read with such morbid ecstasy. Even that smell became eternally dear to me, vividly reminding me of that strange winter: my half-crazy, my sweet, tormenting dreams of the early Christians' tortures, of young maidens torn by wild beasts in some place called "arena"; of kings' daughters, pure and fair as God's lilies beheaded at the hands of their own ferocious parents; of torrid, silent deserts where, covering their nakedness only with their own hair that reached, to the ground, there lived, purging with prayer their lechery in the world, Mary of Egypt, and the old monk Gerasim, and where the lions dug graves with their own claws for them when they died in purity; of the Kiev catacombs where lie the hosts of martyrs who, for our Lord's sake, buried themselves there alive in order to pass their time in tears and constant prayer and vigil in the underground obscurity full of all kinds of nocturnal horrors, temptations, and devil's scoffings. . . . I lived solely by the inward contemplation of these pictures and images, isolating myself from home life, enclosing myself in my fairy-holy world, intoxicating

myself with my painful joys, with the craving for sufferings, for self-exhaustion, for self-mortification. I would wander about the house like a somnambulist, seeing nobody and nothing, yielding to no persuasions or exhortations, even my mother's. I already knew that all the saints, too, had always, in their adolescence, been tearfully and reproachfully exhorted by their "elderly and pious" parents. I hoped fervently to be one day canonised as a martyr, and would kneel secretly for hours on end in some empty room; from old pieces of string I knitted myself something like a hair shirt, drank only water, ate nothing but black bread. . . .

This lasted through the whole winter. But towards the spring it began gradually to pass, and finally faded away completely—somehow by itself, I do not even remember how. There came sunny March days, the double window-panes began to warm up, and over them crawled the flies who had come back to life—it was difficult not to be distracted by all this as I knelt and writhed on the ground, actions which no longer gave the former full, sincere, prayerful ecstasies. April came, and on one particularly sunny day, the winter window-panes sparkling in the sun began to be taken out, to be torn off with crackling sounds, and the whole house was filled with animation, with disorder, bestrewn all over with putty and tow; and then the summer windows were thrown open to fresh air, to freedom, towards the new young life, and through

the rooms spread the smell of the fresh and soft field air, of the earth and its soft dampness; and there came the first solemn, lazy cawing of the rooks which had arrived some time before. . . . In the evening, blue spring clouds would pile up fantastically against the scarlet slowly fading Western sky; the frogs would start their sleepy, dreamy, soothing trilling on the field pond, in the slowly thickening darkness, promising a warm beneficent rain in the night. . . . And again, again the ever-deceiving (not of its own will evidently) earth would draw me tenderly and insistently into its maternal embrace. . . .

The day of my grandmother's death (I remember), that long day in the deserted manor, was quiet and sad, and Olya and I were looking all the time over to Baturino—everything there had changed in some wrong way, had taken on some silent and sinister look—but I also remember that with that sadness and heaviness there was another feeling in my soul: resignation, probably inevitable, and the only solutary lesson of that winter. I remember how I wanted all the time to imagine what was actually happening over there in Baturino, but my soul fought against it, wishing to transform the reality into something else, wanting some soothing illusion, and involuntarily these lines rang within me:

“The departed was laid on the table, dressed in the clothes which she herself had appointed, her hands crossed, a wax candle put between her

fingers—Afanasy Ivanovich looked at it all listlessly. A whole crowd came to the funeral: long tables were placed about in the courtyard; rice-pudding, liqueurs, pies covered them in piles. The visitors talked, wept, gazed at the departed, discussed her qualities, and looked at him, but he himself looked at everything in a queer way. At last the body was taken away, people crowded after. . . . The priests wore full vestments, the sun shone, the babies cried in their mothers' arms, the larks sang. . . ."

Yes, the larks sang meekly, the babies cried meaninglessly, the table was bending under the weight of viands for the greedy funeral feast, and Afanasy Ivanovich looked "listlessly and queerly." Life went on, and he looked "queerly" round him. Was it that he understood neither life, nor that death, nor the world's doings in general?

Nor did I, I understood nothing—and I bent my head in resignation.

## XIX

THREE months later I was already wearing a blue peaked cap with a silver badge on the band. Aliosha simply ceased to exist—there was now Arseniev, Alexey, a pupil in the first form of the boys' school.

By summer no trace seemed to be left of the bodily and mental distresses which I had undergone the winter before. Moreover—I seemed never to



have felt so well or so strong as then; besides, I had greatly matured, or, to be more exact, I had completely outgrown childhood: I say so because I well remember how, that summer, I was differently and more fully aware of things in a normal adult way. And I felt pleasant, quiet, and gay—quite in harmony not only with the cheerful, dry weather which lasted throughout that summer, but also with the light mood which pervaded our house. Nadya had already—even to my mother and the nurse—become only a beautiful memory; a conception of a childishly angelic image dwelling happily somewhere up above, in the everlasting mansions of heaven, my mother and the nurse would still be sad, would often talk about her, but rather differently from before—sometimes even with smiles; they would sometimes weep, but not with the same hopeless and bitter tears. As for my grandmother, she was simply forgotten; indeed, her death was one reason (a hidden one, of course) for the light mood of our household: in the first place, Baturino now belonged to us, which had greatly improved our plight; and secondly, the autumn was to see our removal thither, which also secretly made everyone rejoice as any change of surroundings usually does, involving hopes of betterment, or maybe unconscious recollections of distant, nomadic times.

My father, of course, was in higher spirits than anyone else. He was, after all, the liveliest and the most responsive to anything pleasant. And there

was plenty to rejoice him: he had once more stopped drinking, and the weather was good—which always affected him greatly—and we were to move to another estate, which meant almost starting a new life. He was also naturally pleased by my grandmother's legacy, though this in a peculiar way of his own: as a man who all his life had craved for every kind of self-ruination I mean an emancipation from any burdens and liabilities of life, he was pleased above all by hopes of new squandering. He was, I repeat, particularly gay, care-free, good-hearted and nice that summer. And since his mood was apt to be transmitted very easily to the whole household, and to myself in particular, I felt doubly well.

After my mother's stories told me by the nurse, I pictured to myself the real, no longer the fictitious, scene that had been enacted in Baturino when my mother and father came driving there in such haste: a May day, the cosy courtyard surrounded by old outhouses, the old wooden house with wooden columns at the porches, behind the house the old orchard green with all its May richness, the dark-blue and crimson upper glass-panes in the hall windows—and underneath them, on the two tables placed together, covered with hay under a sheet, and butted askew against the ikon corner, a small pale old woman in white indented bonnet, is neatly laid, with small transparent hands crossed on her breast, covered up to the waist with silver

brocade; and round her, huge candles in church candlesticks burn with yellow tongues, and at her head stands a nun, a very neat elderly maid, who without raising her long eyelashes is monotonously reading aloud in a high strange admonitory voice which my father, with a malicious smile, called seraphic. . . . That word often came to my mind during that summer, and I was vaguely aware of its uncanny, fascinating, yet rather unpleasant hidden meaning. Unpleasant also was the whole scene which I pictured to myself. But now only unpleasant—no more. And that unpleasantness was more than compensated by the pleasant, though *sinful*, thought, occurring now and then, that grandmother's beautiful manor had now become ours, that I would come there for my first holidays—already God willing as a second-form boy—and my father would pick out for me a riding mare from among my grandmother's horses, the nimblest and also the quietest, which would grow so fond of me that she would follow me everywhere at my beck and call.

There were, of course, many other unpleasant things: the anticipation of a painful parting from my mother, from Olya, from Baskakov, and from my childhood's nest, the fear of a lonely unfamiliar life with strange townspeople, the fear of something called school, with its strict, stern, uniformed teachers. . . . But what saved me was that which saves always and everybody—that happy-go-lucky

spirit which is proper not only to childhood, but to any age, the not-thinking-out-to-the-end of things painful or terrible which must come or are already there, and in which one refuses to the last to believe. Now and then I would feel a pang in my heart at the sight of my mother or Baskakov, who of course felt the same at seeing me, but at once I would cheer myself by saying: "it won't be for some time yet!"—and my mind would turn gladly to the pleasant, inviting things which also lay in store for me, after all: I would be a school-boy, wearing uniform, living in town, with comrades from whom I would choose a faithful friend. . . . A new, unfamiliar life, of course, is dreadful, but then what charms it can have! The person who chiefly encouraged and allured me with pictures of that new life was my brother George, who seemed to me to be quite an extraordinary creature: he was then extremely handsome in his slim, fresh youthfulness, the candour of his high forehead, his radiant eyes, the dark flush of his cheeks. He was not just an ordinary somebody, but an undergraduate of the Imperial University of Moscow, who had finished with a gold medal his time at that very school which I was about to enter.

At last, on August the sixth, I was taken to the examinations. When the tarantass rumbled up to the porch, the faces of my mother, the nurse and Baskakov, altered; Olya started crying, and my

father and brothers exchanged awkward smiles. "Well, let's sit down for a bit," said my father resolutely, and we all sat down hesitatingly. "Well, God speed you," he said still more resolutely after a moment, and everybody started at once crossing themselves, and rose. My legs felt weak with fear, and I was crossing myself so zealously and hurriedly that my mother rushed towards me, her eyes full of tears and began kissing and crossing me. But I had already recovered—whilst she was tearfully kissing and crossing me, I was thinking: "Who knows? Perhaps, with God's help, I'll be ploughed after all. . . ."

But I was not. For three years I had been trained for that ominous day, and I was merely asked to multiply fifty-five by thirty, to tell who the Amalekites had been, to write a tricky sentence in a fair legible hand, and to recite a verse of Pushkin. Here they did not even let me finish: I had hardly come to the awakening of the cattle "in the soft meadows," when I was stopped—probably the teacher (a red-haired man with gold spectacles and wide-open nostrils) was too familiar with that awakening—for he hurriedly said:

"That's all right—quite enough—I see you know it. . . ."

Yes, my brother had been right: there proved to be "nothing particularly dreadful". Everything turned out much simpler than I expected and came to a close with unexpected swiftness, ease, and

uneventfulness. And yet I had crossed a really important threshold in my life.

The fairy road to the town, where I had not been since the time of my first famous journey,—the town itself, once so magical—nothing was the same as before, nothing now fascinated me in any way. The hotel near St. Michael's I found rather unprepossessing—God only knows whence my worldly wisdom came; the three-storied building of the school behind a high wall, at the end of a large cobbled courtyard, I accepted as something already familiar, though never before had I entered such a huge, clean, echoing building. Nor did the masters in their gold-buttoned tail-coats turn out to be either astounding or alarming—some with flaming red hair, others with tar-black, but all equally large,—the puffy-faced priest in a violet silk cassock which smelt sweetly of incense and tobacco smoke,—not even the headmaster himself, who looked like a hyena. . . .

After the examination we were told at once that I had been admitted, and was being given leave till the first of September. A great burden seemed to fall from my father's shoulders—for the simple reason, of course, that he had been terribly bored with sitting silently in the masters' common room where my knowledge was being tested—and still more so was it the case with me. Everything turned out excellently: I had passed, and I had three more weeks of freedom ahead. I really ought

to have been terrified, I who since my birth, and up to that very moment, had always enjoyed complete freedom and who had suddenly become enslaved, being given only three weeks' respite, yet even this I accepted as proper, feeling only one thing. "Thank God! Three full weeks!"—as if those three weeks would never end. And feeling both of us excited, with an extraordinary sense of freedom of soul and body, we emerged from the school gates and walked quickly along the pavement, treading the brown, sunburnt, pleasantly rustling leaves which covered it.

"Well, let's hurry to the tailor now—and then in for dinner!" said my father gaily, lighting a fat cigarette with peculiar relish.

We called on a small shortlegged man who surprised me by the rapidity of his speech with interrogative, and as it were slightly offended, pauses at the close of each sentence, and by the adroitness with which he took my measurements; thence to a hatter's, where there were dusty windows warmed by the town sun, and one felt stuffy and squeezed because of the countless hatboxes lying all over the place, in such disorder that the owner fumbled among them tantalisingly long, shouting angrily all the time in some incomprehensible language to a woman in the next room with a mawkish, white, languid face. He, too, was a Jew, but of quite a different sort: an old man with heavy ringlets, in a long frock-coat of black lustrine,

a lustrine skullcap pushed back on his head, large, very fat round the chest and armpits, morose, discontented, with a big sooty-black beard growing from right under his eyes—together, a dreadful, sepulchral creature. And it was he who at last chose for me an excellent blue peaked cap with two bright white silver twigs standing out on its band. I had that cap on when I came home—to everybody's joy, even to my mother's, a joy quite incomprehensible to me now, for wasn't my father quite right when he kept saying: "What the devil does he need those Amalekites for?"

## XX

SOME time towards the end of August my father put on his top-boots, girdled himself with the cartridge belt, flung the game-bag over his shoulder, took his gun from the wall, called me, then his favourite dog, the beautiful ruddy-brown Djalma, and we went across the stubble fields, along the road leading to the pond—after the partridges.

My father had on only a particoloured Russian shirt and a white peaked cap; I, in spite of the dry, hot weather, was of course in my school uniform, which still caused me a pleasant excitement. My father, tall and strong, strode ahead firmly and lightly, the yellow brush of stubble rustling under his feet, and blowing his cigarette smoke back over



his shoulder. I hastened behind, keeping to the right, according to hunting rules, to observe which gave me great pleasure. He whistled encouragingly, exhilaratingly, and Djalma, with sustained eagerness, in a state of keen, glad expectancy, wagged and shook her stiff tail at short frequent intervals; all ears, all eyes, all scenting, she skirted in front of us in swift zig-zag, searching movements. The fields were by now deserted, spacious but summerlike, light and gay. Now the hot breeze would subside completely, and the sun began to be scorching, and one heard the grasshoppers croak hotly, hammering, tick-tacking like little clocks, and now it would blow with soft arid warmth, grow stronger, fly past us, and suddenly curl up a small cloud of dust playfully, on that road so well-trodden during working hours, lifting it up, whirling it in spirals or cones and buoyantly carrying it forward. But our eyes were chiefly on Djalma, who was steadily and quickly drifting away from us, imperceptibly drawing us further and further on. From time to time she would suddenly stiffen, straining forward, and raising her right paw, and stare at something invisible to us which was in front of her. My father would say something in a low voice—she would dash at the invisible thing—and at once—frrr!—a plump, short-tailed partridge would free itself heavily and clumsily (being fat) from under her nose, and after flying for hardly a few yards would flop back on to the field, shot

down. I would run forward, pick it up, put it into my father's game-bag, and we would pursue our way.

Thus we crossed the whole rye-field, then the potato-field, leaving aside the clayey pond, its elongated surface shining hot and dreary to our right, in a hollow amid bare downs trodden by the cattle. Here and there on these, exposed and lost in meditation, sat some rooks. My father looked at them and remarked that the rooks, too, had begun to gather in councils as was their way in autumn, to think about migrating; and for an instant I was once more overwhelmed by a sense of deep anguish, of the imminent parting not only from the summer that was passing, but from all those fields, from all that was so dear and familiar to me in that lovely and desolate country outside which I had as yet seen nothing in the world, in that quiet abode where had blossomed, in such peace and loneliness, my infancy, my childhood, unknown and unwanted by anyone in the world. . . .

Then we bore to the left, making our way towards Zakaz, following the boundary-lines,\* across a measureless black tilled field that was under the harrow. It was still our field, and one of the harrows was dragged over the dry clods of greyish earth by a bay stallion which once, when a thin-legged foal with a silky curling turnip of a tail, had been given to me, and was now, most unfairly, without my

permission being asked, set to work. A hot wind was blowing, and over the tillage shone an August sun, which still looked summery, but was already somehow aimless, and the stallion, who had grown very tall—though tall in a strange, boyish way—was walking obediently along the field, dragging his rope traces, and behind him shuffled and jerked the grid of the harrow, smashing the soil with its slanting iron jags, and a lad in bast-shoes, awkwardly holding the reins, also of rope, in both hands, was hobbling behind. For a long time I looked at that picture, once more with unaccountable sadness. . . .

Zakaz was a fairly big copse belonging to a half-mad squire who, in lonely hostility to the whole world, had shut himself up as in a fortress in his manor near Rozhdestvo, guarded by ferocious colliers, having everlasting lawsuits with the peasants from Rozhdestvo and Novoselki; he could never come to an agreement with them about wages, so that he frequently had whole acres of corn left unmown, or thousands of stacks rotting in the fields far into the autumn and then perishing under the snow. So it was now. We walked towards Zakaz across unmown yellow oat-fields, tramped and crushed by the cattle, lying flat on the ground. Here Djalma put up a few more partridges; I would again run and pick them up, and we would go farther on, circumventing Zakaz along a thick millet field which glistened silkily under the sun

with its brown tassels, bent to earth, full of grain, which sounded underfoot particularly dry and sonorous, like beads. My father unbuttoned his collar, his face reddened. "Dreadfully hot, and I am terribly thirsty," he said, "let's go across the wood, to the pond." And jumping a ditch which separated the field from the wooded glade, we went through the wood, entering its August realm, clear and luminous, touched here and there with yellow, all gay and charming.

Of birds there were already but few—only blackbirds in flocks, with merry, would-be fierce screaming and sated clucking, flew hither and thither; the wood was deserted, spacious, sparse, sunny, and one could see right through it from end to end. We walked now under the old birches, now across the broad glades where stood the free, strong, spreading oaks, not nearly so dark as in summer, with thinning, sere leafage. We walked in their chequered shadow, breathing their dry fragrance, on the dry slippery grass, and looked ahead where other open glades shone in the heat, and beyond them a small copse of young maple undergrowth showed canary yellow. When we entered the path through that copse to the pond, there flashed up suddenly, with a crackling from the undergrowth, from among the palmate hazel-trees, from almost under our feet, an old golden-russet snipe. My father was so struck by such an early visitor, that he was quite taken aback—he fired,

of course, instantly, but missed. After wondering where a snipe could have come from at that time of the year, and giving vent to his vexation at the miss, he went to the pond, laid down his gun, squatted and began to drink with cupped hands. Then, puffing with pleasure and wiping his mouth with his sleeve, he lay on the shore and lit a cigarette. The water in the pond was crystal-clear, a special woodland water, for there is in general something quite peculiar to these solitary woodland ponds almost unhaunted by anyone but birds and beasts. In its fathomless clarity, the tops of the surrounding birches and oaks were quietly reflected, drowned, like some spellbound sky, and lisped and rustled under the wind from the fields. And to the sound of that rustling, lying with his head propped on one arm, my father shut his eyes and dozed off. Djalma also drunk some water from the pond; then she flopped into it, swam for a while keeping her head warily above the water, her ears drooping like burdock leaves, and then, suddenly turning back, as if afraid of the depth, she dashed out swiftly on to the shore and shook herself vigorously, spattering us with water. Now, with her long red tongue lolling out, she was sitting next to my father, now looking at me inquiringly, now gazing about her impatiently. . . . I got up and wandered aimlessly away among the trees, in the direction from which we had approached the wood across the oat-field. . . .

## XXI

THERE, beyond the glade, beyond the trunks, from under the leafy shed, the expanse of fields shone yellow and dry; from it rose the caressing warmth, the light and happiness of the last days of summer. On my right, from behind the trees, floated up a large white cloud from goodness knows where, and growing irregular and marvellously rotund against the azure, slowly sailed by, changing shape as it went. After walking a few steps I also lay down, on twigs and slippery grass, amid scattered, luminous, sunny trees, which seemed to be walking about me, in the soft shade of a twoforked birch-tree, two white-trunked sisters with tiny greyish leaves and catkins; I, too, propped my head on one arm, and began looking now over at the field shining bright yellow behind the trunks, now up at that cloud. A dry heat was wafted softly up from the field, the light-coloured wood quivered and rippled, one heard its slumberous noise which seemed to run away somewhere. At times that noise increased, grew stronger, and then the netlike shadow would become variegated, would stir, the sunny patches would flame up and gleam on the ground and on the trees, their branches bending and opening up to show the sky. . . .

What did I think—if indeed thinking it can be called? I thought, of course, about my imminent move to town, about school, about the wonderful

people whom I had seen there, called school-masters and belonging almost to a peculiar species of men whose sole mission was to teach and to inspire their pupils with constant awe; and once more I felt terrified and bewildered—why was I being given into slavery to them, severed from home, from Kamenka, from that cheerful copse? I was struck by the thought that after all this was inevitable—and that not only I, but everybody, accepted this absurdity as something unavoidable, and in fact were not terrified, or rather they were terrified just as I was—only for a moment, and then would instantly recover their calm. Then I thought about the stallion whom I had seen harrowing the field. My vague thoughts ran, I suppose, like this: Yes, everything was really illusory in this world—I had imagined that stallion to be mine, and they disposed of him without asking me, as if he were their own property,—and this thought angered me for a moment, calling forth a sense of shame and offence: well, all right! I said menacingly, addressing someone mentally, yet feeling my utter helplessness to give that menace reality—and I thought, further: yes, there had once been a thin-legged, mouse-coloured foal, trembling and skittish like all foals, but also gay, trustful, with clear eyes like plums, attached only to his mother who always neighed with sustained pleasure and fondness at sight of him, but otherwise absolutely free and careless. . . . That colt one happy day had been

presented to me, given into my full keeping, and for a time I rejoiced in him. dreaming of him, of my future with him, of the intimacy which not only would spring up, but already had sprung up, between us because he had been given to me; and then I had begun gradually to forget him—so no wonder that everybody else forgot that he was mine. After all, I had ended by forgetting him completely—just as I should probably forget Baskakov, and Olya, and perhaps even my father, whom I loved so much now, with whom it was such joy to go shooting, and just as I would forget the whole of Kamenka, where every nook and corner was dear and familiar to me. . . . Two years had passed—as if they had never been there!—and where was he now, that silly carefree colt? There was a three-year-old horse, a stallion—and where was his old happy freedom? There he was, trudging the fields in harness, dragging a harrow behind him—and that for ever: good-bye for ever to his freedom! And was not the same thing happening to me as had happened to that colt?

This last thought, of course, I could not formulate so exactly. But I well remember my sadness as I thought about the colt, and occasionally admired my brand-new dark-blue peaked cap with its white silver twigs on the band. . . .

What need had I of the Amalekites? I felt awestruck and bewildered in turn, but what could I do? The cloud shone and whitened from behind



the birch-trees, changing its shape continuously. . . Could it help changing? The luminous wood rippled, quivered, and ran away somewhere with its sleepy lisp and rustle. . . . Whither, and why? Could one stop it? And closing my eyes I would vaguely feel that everything was a dream, an incomprehensible dream—the town somewhere over there, beyond the wood, beyond the distant fields, whither I was bound to go, and my future there, and my past in Kamenka, and this bright late summer day already drawing towards evening, and myself, and my thoughts, my dreams, my feelings—all was but a dream! Was it sad, or painful? No, for the time being it was happy and pleasant. Once, on the threshold of childhood, a dream had pursued me for a time: with infinite sadness, with unspeakable hopelessness, with terrible and painful actuality I saw a boundless space, empty above, below, and all sides, and in it, somewhere far to my right—the orb of the reddening sun about to set, pure, bright, but inexpressibly sad, which, I knew, could never set, and at the same time I saw myself: alone, utterly alone in all that primeval void, in the deathly glimmer of that unsetting sun, I had to hold a stone fish fast in my mouth, and hold it I did, gripping it ever tighter and tighter. . . . That dream was the more horrible as I knew even in my sleep that it was a dream, a prophetic and everlasting dream. The nurse said it was all rubbish—"You've got new teeth coming through,

Alioshenka"—but after it I would feel out of sorts all day long, all the time it would seem to me still going on, still making itself felt all over the world, and that I was still within it, within that dream—and I was tormented by such desperate anguish as I think I shall never know even in the hereafter. . . . Yes, that was a dream, and now, . . .

As if to confirm my pleasant feeling that now, after all, things were by no means the same as before, in that incomprehensible dream of the common human life upon which I had irrevocably entered, a shot suddenly rang out behind me, echoing through the whole wood, encircling it with its reverberation, after which my ears caught a particularly fierce screaming and clucking of the blackbirds, which apparently flashed into the air in a huge flock, and the mad, delighted barking of Djalma: it was my father who had woken up and fired. And instantly forgetting all my meditations, I rushed off like an arrow towards him—to pick up the dead blackbirds, bleeding and still warm, smelling sweetly of game and powder.

## **Book Two**



## I

ON the day when I left Kamenka not realizing that I was leaving it for good, and drove off to school—by the Tchernavsk road, new to me—I first became aware of the romance of the forsaken highways, of the soul of old Russia that was becoming a thing of the past, a legend. Highways were passing into oblivion; so also was the Tchernavsk road. Its old ruts were grown over with grass, the ancient willows standing here and there on either side of its wide deserted track looked lonely and sad. I remember one, particularly lonely and decrepit, a hollow, storm-battered skeleton. On it, black like a black brand, sat a great raven, and my father said—and this impressed me deeply—that ravens live for several hundred years and that this particular raven may have lived under the Tartars. . . . Wherein lay the fascination of what he said and of what I then felt? In the sense of Russia and of it being my country? In the sense of my connexion with things past, things remote, things held in common, which always gives our soul, our personal existence, a momentary expansion, and a strange, heartening reminder of our participation in those common things?

He said that once upon a time Mamay himself had marched through those parts on his way to Moscow from the South, and in passing had razed and sacked our town, and then that we were going to pass Stanovaya, a big village, which had quite recently been a famous brigands' den and acquired particular notoriety through a certain Mitka, so gruesome a monster that, when at last he was caught, he was not simply hanged but quartered. I remember that just at that moment, between Stanovaya and us, to the left of the highway there passed a train: I had never seen one before. Evening was drawing near, behind us the sun was sinking westward and throwing a straight beam of light on something which looked like a mechanical toy and quickly outpaced us, as it sped towards the town—a small, perky engine with a tail of smoke trailing backward from its large-headed funnel, and tiny green, yellow and blue houses upon spinning wheels. The engine, those little houses which made one long to live in them, their small windows glittering against the sun, that swift inanimate rolling of the wheels—it was all so quaint and amusing; but I well remember that I felt much more drawn to the other thing, to something which my imagination fancied yonder, beyond the railway line, where one could see the willows of the mysterious and terrible Stanovaya. The Tartars, Mamay, Mitka. . . . No doubt it was on that particular evening that I first became aware of being

Russian and living in Russia, and not simply in Kamenka, in such-and-such a district and such-and-such a parish, and suddenly I felt Russia, felt her past and present, her vast complex life, her wild, sometimes terrible yet somehow captivating, peculiarities, and my own kinship, my nearness to her. . . .

Certainly, the general setting of my early days was very Russian.

## II

TAKE, for instance, Stanovaya. Later on, of course, I was frequently in Stanovaya and became fully satisfied that there had been no highwaymen there for a long time. Yet I could never view the place quite straightforwardly; I always felt that there was good reason for its inhabitants still being famed as born villains. And then the famous Stanovlyansky ravine. The main road descended, near Stanovaya, into a fairly deep ravine and this place invariably inspired an almost superstitious terror in any belated traveller, at any time of the year when he passed through it; and more than once in my youth I myself had felt that purely Russian terror when passing near Stanovaya. There were many other famous spots on the Tchernavsk road—such where once upon a time, at their own peculiar hour, from various hidden ravines and gulleys, the “brave lads” came out to the highway as soon as their quick ears, in the still

night, caught the distant plaint of the bells or the clatter of the ordinary carts; but the Stanovlyansky ravine enjoyed the greatest fame of all. At night, one's heart would always sink as one approached it, and Heaven knows which was worse—to drive the horses at full speed, or to lead them at a walking-pace, straining one's ears for the slightest sound? One fancied all the time that in a moment *they* might be there—slowly crossing your way, small axes in their hands, low and tightly girdled over the loins, with caps drawn over their keen eyes, and that they would suddenly stop and in low, exaggeratedly quiet voices give the order: "Halt, wait a moment, merchant. . . ." And which would be more dreadful—to hear that order of theirs amid the peaceful silence, the quiet semi-darkness of the nocturnal summer fields, or through the howl of a wintry wind, or a white blinding blizzard, or under the sharp, icy, autumnal stars in whose half-light one can see the dead, blackening earth spreading far around, and when one's own carriage wheels make such a terrible clatter on the stone-hard road?

After Stanovaya, the main road was crossed by another road, and here there was a barrier, a toll-gate: one had to stop and wait till a soldier of the time of Nicholas the First, emerging from his striped sentry box, would release a similarly striped bar; with clinking chain it would slowly rise up (for which one had to pay the Government a toll



of two kopecks, regarded by all travellers as daylight robbery). That sentry-box, that bar, their black-and-white, mourning-like stripes, the hundred-year-old soldier with his bushy grey whiskers and ruined, worn boots—this was a fairly recent Russia, a Russia of the days of Pushkin or Gogol. But further on the periods were mingled again; the road ran at first along the Runaways Suburb which supplied the town with workmen (millers, tanners) and vagabonds, both classes equally famed for their immeasurable rudeness and their unmatched skill in swearing; then past a fathomless swamp of filth which bore an extremely obscene name, and at last along the causeway between a new prison-house and an ancient monastery. The town itself boasted of its antiquity, as it was fully entitled to do: it was, and indeed still is, one of the most ancient Russian towns, situated amid the wide black-earth fields of the Substeppe, at that fatal line behind which there once stretched "wild, unknown lands," and in the days of the Principalities of Suzdal and Ryazan it had been one of the principal bulwarks of Russia, which, according to the chroniclers, were the first to take the impact of the storm, the dust, and the cold from the threatening Asiatic swarms which ever and anon gathered over them, the first to see the sky aflame with the terrible fires they kindled by day and night, the first to forewarn Muscovy of imminent calamity, the first also to lay down

their lives for her. In its time it had, of course, lived more than once through all that befitted it: in such-and-such a century it was "razed to its foundations" by one khan, in such-and-such by another, in such-and-such by a third, in the year so-and-so it was "laid waste" by a great fire, then by famine, by plague, and so on. . . . Under such conditions it could not, of course, preserve any tangible historical relics. But the past nevertheless was very much felt in it; it was perceptible in the solid way of life of the merchants and the lower-middle-class, in the mischief and fisticuffs of its suburbanites living in the Black Suburb, Riverside and Agramatcha, which lay over the river on those yellow cliffs which had struck me when I was a small child and over which some Tartar prince was said to have toppled with his horse. And what a smelly town it was! Almost from the barrier, whence it was already in full view, with its countless churches sparkling far off in the vast plain, there was a gradual succession of smells: first, it smelt of the swamp with the obscene name, then of the tanneries, then of the sun-warmed iron roofs, then of the Woodenware Place where the peasants took up their trading stances on market days, and then it smelt of something one could no longer distinguish—of everything that is proper to an old and well-to-do Russian town. . . .

## III

IN the school I spent four years, staying as boarder with the family of a certain Rostovtsev, in poor, lower-middle-class surroundings: to other surroundings I could have no access, as well-to-do citizens were in no need of boarders.

How dreadful was the beginning of that life! The mere fact of it being my first evening in town, the first after parting from my father and mother, the first in absolute solitude and, besides, in new and poverty-stricken surroundings, in two poky rooms, among people absurdly unfamiliar and alien to me, whom I, a gentleman's son, naturally regarded as very low, and who had yet suddenly acquired even some power over me—that in itself was dreadful. The Rostovtsevs had also another boarder, a boy of the same age and from the same form as I, the natural son of a Baturino squire, red-haired Glebochka; but on that evening we had not yet established contact: he sat sulkily in a corner like a caged cub, shyly and doggedly silent, looking at me askance with an animal mistrust, nor was I in any hurry to proffer him my friendship—because, among other reasons, he seemed to me to be a common boy from whom one ought to keep aloof: when still in Kamenka I knew that we were going to live together and once I heard our nurse call him a bad name referring to his bastard origin. Out of doors it was gloomy,

as if on purpose; towards evening it had started to drizzle, the endless stony street on which I gazed from the little window was dead and deserted, and on a half-bare tree behind the fence of the opposite house, a crow sat croaking, humpbacked and taut, portending no good; on the tall belfry rising far beyond the dusty iron roofs, into the murky darkening sky, something sang and played every quarter of an hour, softly, pathetically, and hopelessly. . . . My father on such an evening would have at once shouted for someone to light the lamps, bring in the samovar, or lay the table for supper before time—"I loathe this beastly gloom!" But here lamps were not lit till it was quite dark, and people did not sit down to table at any odd time—here everything had its fixed hour. And so it was now: the lamps were lit only when it grew quite dark and the master of the house came home from town. He was a tall, stately man with regular features, a dark-complexioned face, a stiff black beard shot here and there with silvery hairs; extremely sparing of words, invariably exacting and edifying, he had firm rules in every matter, alike for himself and for the others, a sort of charter of respectable life, both domestic and public, drawn up once and for all "not by us, silly, but by our fathers and their fathers before them". He was engaged in buying and reselling corn and cattle, and was therefore often absent. But even when he was absent, in his house, in his family (which consisted of a comely

and tranquil wife, two quiet young girls with bare rounded necks, and a son aged sixteen) there reigned invariably an atmosphere established by his austere and noble spirit, one of silence, order, businesslike ways, deliberation in every action and word. . . . Now, in this sad twilight hour, the mistress of the house and the girls, each engaged in her handiwork, were silently but watchfully expecting him for supper. And as soon as the gate outside banged, they all frowned slightly.

"Manya, Xyusha, will you lay the table," said the hostess in a low voice, and rising from her seat she went into the kitchen.

He came in, quietly frowning, took off his cap and greatcoat in the small parlour, and was left with only a light grey *poddiovka* which, together with his embroidered Russian shirt and well-fitting calf-skin boots, peculiarly emphasised his Russian fitness. After saying something discreetly affable to his wife, he carefully washed his hands under a brass water-container which hung over a basin in the kitchen, rinsing and shaking them vigorously. Xyusha, the younger girl, with lowered eyes, handed him a long clean towel. He wiped his hands deliberately, threw the towel on to her head with a gloomy grin—whereat she blushed joyously—and entering the room made several neat and beautiful signs of the cross, and bowed to the ikons in the corner. . . .

My first supper with the Rostovtsevs remained

also firmly embedded in my mind—and not only because it consisted of dishes very strange to me. First we were given some broth, then, on a wooden round plate, some grey, shaggy tripe the very look and smell of which set me a-tremble, and which the master of the house minced and cut into small bits, taking them simply with his hands; the tripe was accompanied by salted water-melon, and in the end came buck-wheat pudding with milk. But that was nothing. The point is that as I ate only the broth and the water-melon, the host looked askance at me and dryly remarked:

“One must get used to everything, young sir. We are simple Russian folk; we eat ordinary dishes; with us there are no delicacies.”

I had the impression that he had pronounced the last words almost haughtily, with particular emphasis and gravity,—and here for the first time I caught the savour of something which afterwards I inhaled very deeply in town—the savour of pride.

#### IV

GENERALLY speaking, pride sounded more often than not in what Rostovtsev said. Pride in what? In the fact, of course, that the Rostovtsevs were Russians, genuine Russians, that they lived the peculiarly simple and outwardly modest life which was the real Russian life, and than which there was and could be nothing better: for, after all, it was modest

only in appearance, and in fact it was richer than anywhere else, and in general was the outcome of the traditional spirit of Russia; and Russia was wealthier, stronger, more righteous and more glorious than any other country in the world. And was that pride characteristic only of Rostovtsev? Afterwards I saw that it was proper to many others, and now I see another thing too: that in a way it was then a sign of the times, that it made itself particularly felt at that epoch, and not only in our town.

Where did it disappear to later on, when Russia was going to rack and ruin? How came it that we did not uphold everything that we so proudly called Russian, of the solidity and righteousness of which we seemed to be so certain? However that may be, I know for sure that I grew up in the epoch of the greatest Russian might, and of the full consciousness of it. The field of my boyish observations was very limited, and what I did then observe was, I repeat, significant. Yes, afterwards I learned that Rostovtsev was far from being the only one to hold forth with such speeches; time and again I heard those feignedly humble assertions—we, people said, are simple folks, with us even the Tsar Alexander Alexandrovich wears blacked boots—and now I have no doubt that they were quite characteristic not only of our town, but generally of the Russian sentiments of that time. In the manifestation of those sentiments there was, of course,

a lot of acting and showiness—thus, for example, every townsman acted at every street-corner at the sight of a church at the bottom of the street, taking off his cap, crossing himself and bowing almost to the ground. Now and again, of course, people would forget their roles, words often were not attuned to life; often enough one feeling would give place to another and contrary one: Yet what prevailed?

Rostovtsev said once, pointing to a window-ledge on which he had chalked some marks:

“What do we want bills for? It ain’t Russian. In the good old days no one so much as heard of them, and a tradesman simply wrote down who owed him money and how much, like this, for instance, with chalk on the ledge. The first time the debtor failed to pay in time, the tradesman reminded him of it politely. One more failure to pay and he warned him, ‘See, there, don’t you forget a third time, or else I’ll wipe off my mark—what a shame that will bring you then!’”

People like him were, of course, few. By his occupation he was a *kulak*, but he did not naturally regard himself as such, and had no reason to: he rightly called himself a simple tradesman, being quite unlike not only other *kulaks*, but a great many of our townsmen as well. Occasionally he would look in on us, his boarders, and suddenly ask with a faint smile:

“Did they give you any poetry to learn to-day?”



"Yes," we said.

"What poetry?"

We mumbled:

"The sky in the hour of watch—traversing the moon—shines through the pattern—of the frosted window-pane. . . ."

"Now, that doesn't read well somehow," he would say. "'The sky in the hour of watch traversing the moon'—I can't quite make that out."

Nor could we, for somehow we never paid attention to the comma after the word "traversing." Quite true, it did not read well. And we did not know what to say when he went on to ask:

"And what else?"

"And then 'Of the shade of the old tall oak-tree a tuneful little bird was fond, in the storm-shattered branches it sought shelter and rest. . . .'"

"Well, that's nice, that's sweet. But read those others—about the evensong and 'Under the vast tent'."

And I would begin confusedly:

"'Come ye O suffering! Come ye O joyous! they ring for evensong, for gracious prayer. . . .'"

He would listen and shut his eyes with a quiet smile. Then I would read Nikitin's "Under the vast tent of the azure sky I see the vista of the steppes stretching away. . . ." It was a broad and enthusiastic description of the vast expanse, of the great and manifold riches, forces, and deeds of

Russia. And when I came to the proud and joyous finale, to the winding-up of that description: "'Tis thee my potent Russia, my orthodox country!" —Rostovtsev would clench his teeth and turn pale.

"Yes, that's a poem!" he would say, opening his eyes, trying to look composed, rising and making for the door. "That's a thing to learn hard. And who wrote it after all? An ordinary decent man of our class—a countryman of our own!"

The rest of the "trading men" of our town, both great and small, were not Rostovtsevs, I repeat; usually their worth lay only in their words: a trace of brigandage entered into their business, and they were "intent on stripping both living and dead"; they fobbed off and foisted upon people like down-right swindlers, lied and perjured themselves without shame and conscience, led dirty and coarse lives, talked scandal about one another, gave themselves airs over each other, breathed forth animosity and envy, made horribly mean and cruel fun of the idiots, cripples, and village fools, of whom quite a number paraded the town, looked down on the peasants with quite undisguised contempt, and cheated them with diabolical daring, adroitness, and cheerfulness. Nor were the other fellow-citizens of Rostovtsev particularly saintly—everybody knows what was and is, a Russian official, a Russian chief, a Russian man-in-the-street, a Russian worker. But then they had also their merits. As for pride in Russia and everything

Russian, there was, I repeat once more, enough and to spare of it. And it wasn't Rostovtsev alone who could, in those days, turn pale repeating Nikitin's exclamation: "'Tis thee; my potent Russia!"—or talking about Skobelev, about Tchernyaev, about the Tsar-Emancipator, listening in the cathedral to the mention of "our most pious, most autocratic, great Sovereign Alexander Alexandrovich" coming from the thundering lips of the golden-haired and golden-bearded deacon—and suddenly perceiving, almost with terror, over what a really unfathomable realm of various countries, tribes, nations, over what incalculable riches of the earth and forces of life, of "peaceful and prosperous living" the Russian crown was raised. . . .

## V

THE beginning of my school life was even more dreadful than my worst expectations. My first evening in town was enough to make me think "All is over!" But still more dreadful, perhaps, was the fact that after this I very quickly submitted myself to fate, and my existence became a rather ordinary school life, apart from my rather unusual sensitiveness. The morning when Glebochka and I went to school for the first time was sunny, and that in itself was enough to cheer us. Besides, what little swells we looked! Everything was brand-new, everything solid, well-fitting; everything made

us rejoice—the well-polished boots, the light grey cloth of our trousers, our blue suits with silver buttons, the bright blue caps on our close-cropped heads, our creaking satchels smelling of leather, containing textbooks, pen-cases, pencils, copybooks bought only yesterday. . . . And then—the vivid and festive newness of the school—its clean cobbled courtyard; the window-panes and the brass door-handles shining in the sun; the spacious echoing corridors; the bright class-rooms, halls, and stair-cases freshly painted during summer; the echoing hubbub and shouting of the thronging mob of boys invading them with an excitement redoubled after the summer recess; the decorous solemnity of the first prayer before studies in the great hall; the first sorting-out over classes “in pairs and keeping step”, preceded by a real soldier, a retired captain, commanding and briskly marching ahead of us; the first disputes over taking possession of seats; and finally, the first appearance in the class-room of the schoolmaster, his long coat with its crane’s tail, his thick gleaming spectacles, the air of myopic surprise in his eyes, his uplifted beard, the portfolio under his arm. . . . In a few days it all became as habitual as if no other life had ever existed. And days, weeks, months ran by. . . .

Learning was easy to me, though I was good only in subjects which I more or less liked; in others I was mediocre, relying upon my ability to grasp everything quickly, except some particularly

loathsome things like aorists. Three-quarters of the things we were taught were, of course, of no earthly use to us, left no trace in us, and were taught in an obtuse, official way, just, in fact, as they are taught in nearly all the schools of the world, from century to century. Most of our schoolmasters were ordinary, insignificant men; among them stood out a few cranks, who were, of course, "ragged" in the classrooms, and a couple of real lunatics. One of these was remarkable: he suffered from the fear of life's dirt; he ate, drank, and talked with great difficulty; dreading people's breath, touch, he walked always in the middle of the street; in school, after taking off his gloves, he would at once extract his handkerchief in order to avoid directly touching the door-handle or the chair in front of the dais; he was short and thin, with splendid chestnut curls combed backwards, a wonderful white brow, amazingly fine features, a pale face, dark immobile eyes staring sadly and quietly somewhere into the emptiness and space. One can imagine the whiteness of his linen, his inability to stand the smallest shred of fluff on his tail-coat, the shininess of his nails on his milky-blue hands—and how odd he looked in our town, how terribly lonely and hidden was the life of his everlastingly speechless soul!

What else is there to be said of my school years? During them I grew from boyhood to adolescence. But just how that transformation occurred, again,

God alone knows. Outwardly my life went on, of course, in the workaday way, changing only when my father and mother would come to town or when I would be taken to Baturino. The same going to school, the same sad and reluctant evening preparation of lessons for the morrow, the same unfailing dream of the coming vacation, the same counting of the days that remained till Christmas, till summer leave—oh, if only they would flash by more swiftly!—as though we are allotted so many days on earth as to afford to squander them. . . . After the vacation it was even good to return to one's jail. At school everything was familiar already and yet new again and at first interesting: the new form, the new textbooks—the first pages even in algebra are enticing—some new masters and schoolfellows. . . . Even the town itself, its animation, its streets, churches, shops, markets, its sounds and smells began to cause one a pleasant excitement when one came back after a stay in the country.

On the whole, I lived sadly in those years; the perpetual sense of bondage and loneliness, the secret consciousness of wasting one's time and forces on something absolutely useless, in surroundings coarse and painful to a sensitive young soul. . . . But what went to the making of that whole?

## VI

HERE is September, a fine, bright evening. I stroll about the town—they dare not make me learn and box my ears, as they do to Glebochka, who is becoming more and more exacerbated and therefore more and more obstinate and lazy. My soul is full of sadness about the past summer, which, it seemed, would be endless and promised the fulfilment of a host of wonderful plans; of sadness about my aloofness from all who walk and drive in the streets, who trade in the market, who stand about the shops. . . . They all have their own business, their own conversations, all live their habitual adult life—unlike the lonely and sad schoolboy who doesn't as yet take that simple and sound part which they do on this bright, quiet evening, full of every kind of autumnal plenty and well-being. One only feels it vaguely and pleasantly, this well-being, the fact that the town is chokeful with its own wealth and populousness: wealthy to start with, the town trades year in year out with Moscow, with the Volga, with Riga, with Reval, and now is still wealthier—from morning till night the peasants bring into it all their harvests, from morning till night grain pours out all over the town, the markets and squares are covered with veritable mountains of the fruits of the earth, of every kind. Now and again, one meets peasants hurriedly walking right in the middle of the street,

talking loudly as satisfied, tranquil people do, who have at last completed their town business, bought and sold all that was necessary, have already emptied a glass and now, walking towards their carts, are taking a snack of coarse bread. Talking with animation, there also walk on the pavements, those who had been the whole day belabouring these peasants—the sunburnt, dust-covered, everlastingly brisk corn-buying townsmen, who first thing in the morning go outside the town to meet the peasants, outbidding each other and then leading them to their shops and grain-stores; they also are resting now, going to the pothouses to drink tea. And the Long Street, straight as an arrow, leading out of the town to the prison and the monastery, is drowned in dust and in the dazzling glitter of the sun which is just setting at the end of the vista, and in that dusty gold flows a stream of people walking and driving, returning from the trotting races for which our town is likewise notorious—and how many dandified clerks and shop-assistants there are, how many young women rigged out like birds of paradise, how many spruce gigs in which broad-beamed young merchants flaunt before the populace, seated beside their young wives and reining in their trotters! And in the cathedral the bells ring for vespers, over the town a grave and regular sound floats melodiously, and sedate, bearded coachmen, on heavy and comfortable coaches drawn by well-fed black horses, are driving



old merchants' wives holding wax candles in their hands, and striking one either by their yellow puffiness and an abundance of jewels, or by their sepulchral pallor and gauntness. . . .

Here is a feast-day, a mass in the cathedral, a sunny autumn morning. All over the town one feels a solemn tension. Our captain, before taking us on, examines in the school courtyard, where we are all mustered, every one of our buttons. The masters are in uniform, wearing decorations and three-cornered hats. Marching along the streets we are pleasantly aware that the passers-by look upon us as upon an official semi-military body taking a direct part in all the ceremonies which are to mark this day. Towards the cathedral converge the other "departments," which means more uniforms, orders, three-cornered hats, rich epaulets. The nearer we approach the cathedral, the more sonorous, heavier, thicker and more solemn is the din of the cathedral bell. But here is the parvis—"caps off!"—and pressing together, closing into single file, we enter the cool magnificence of the wide-open portal, and the roaring and din of the seventeen-ton bells is already somewhat muffled, right overhead, amply and mercifully—sternly welcoming, receiving and covering you. And what a crowd inside the cathedral, what ponderous magnificence of the ikonostasis decked from top to bottom with gold, of the chapter's golden vestments, of burning thuribles, of blazing

candles, of officialdom of every rank pressing close to the pulpit steps carpeted with red cloth! For a boy's heart all this was not very easy: one's head went giddy with the longdrawn pomposity of the service, with those recitations, incensings, appearances of the priest and elevations of the Host, with the loud roaring of the bass singers and the sweet dying-off of the altos in the choir elegantly displaying now power, now tenderness; with the hot and uncanny proximity of huge bodies pressing upon you on all sides, with the vision of the boar's carcass of the police chief, dreadfully jammed in his short uniform and silver belt, rising just above you. . . .

At night on such occasions the town blazed with purple flames, smoked and reeked of lampions placed on the pavement; the beflagged houses flared in the darkness with fiery, transparent monograms and crowns—this, among my early town impressions, is one of the most memorable. On such occasions there was always in the town a grand parade. And one day Rostovtsev's son—he also was at school, a sixth-form boy—took Glebochka and myself to one of these parades in the public garden, and I was impressed by the dense crowd moving sluggishly along the constricted line of the main avenue, smelling of dust and cheap scents, while at the end of the avenue, on a bandstand shining with multicoloured lampions, a military band poured out a languorous waltz,

roaring and booming out with all its brass trumpets and kettle-drums. On that avenue Rostovtsev suddenly stopped face to face with a pretty young girl who was coming towards us with her girlfriends; blushing, he jokingly clicked his heels and saluted her, and she flashed all over under her waggish hat, in an openly joyous smile. Before the bandstand in the square, a gushing fountain spouted forth in the middle of a large flower-bed, bedewing it with cool watery vapour, and I always remembered its coolness and the fresh, charming smell of the flowers it besprinkled, which, as I afterwards learned, were just called "tobacco": I remembered them because for me that smell became linked up with the sense of being in love, from which I suffered for the first time in my life for a few days after that. It is thanks to her, to that lovely, simple-minded young girl, that I still cannot smell without emotion the fragrance of tobacco-flowers, and she never even as much as knew about me and about the fact that, ever and anon, throughout my life, I remembered her and the coolness of the fountain, and the playing of the military band as soon as I caught that scent. . . . Where is she now? I still see her as she was on that evening, half-a-century ago, still feel something like gratitude towards her, and feel, too, as if there were something still binding us together. . . .

## VII

AND here come the first cold spells: the scant, leaden, tranquil days of late autumn. The town, grown quiet and deserted, has put in the double winter window-frames, lit the fires, donned warm garments, and is providing all the necessities for winter, pleasantly aware already of the winter cosiness and of that ancient, hereditary way of life which it has been living for centuries—of the recurrence of seasons and customs.

"The geese are flying away," says with pleasure Rostovtsev entering the house in a warm greatcoat and a warm cap, and bringing in with him a chill, wintry air. "I just saw a whole flight. . . . I've bought two carts of cabbage from a peasant; take them in Lyubov Andreevna; he'll bring them presently. A beauty of a cabbage, one head like another. . . ."

And I feel comfortable at heart and so sad, sad. I put aside a book by Walter Scott which I took from the school library, and grow pensive—I want to understand and express something that is going on within me. Already I feel the town as something kindred, I see it mentally, scrutinise it. There, where one leaves the town, stands an ancient men's monastery. . . . Everybody says that all the monks in it keep some vodka and sausage behind the ikons in their cells; Glebochka is very curious to know whether the monks wear trousers under their

cassocks, whilst I, thinking of the monastery, call back to mind that morbidly-rapturous period when I fasted and prayed and wished to become a saint, and, furthermore, am somehow stirred by the thought of its antiquity, of its having been more than once besieged, stormed, burnt and looted by the Tartars: I feel some beauty in it which I crave to understand and to express in verses, in a poetical fancy. . . . Then, if one walks from the monastery in the direction of the town following the Long Street, there lie on the left miserable and dirty streets sloping down towards the ravines, towards the foul-smelling tributary of our river where hides are being soaked and rotted: it is shallow, its bottom covered all over with their black layers, and on the shore lie whole mountains of something dirty-brown, stinking pungently and spicily, and there is a line of black trellised sheds where those hides are being dried, and black beam structures where they are being treated, where some dreadful species of men work noisily, in huge multitudes, smoking and swearing, powerful, incredibly greasy and coarse. . . . These are very old places; they are three, four hundred years old; and thinking of them, I feel a longing to speak out, to invent something wonderful about them too, about these foul places. . . . Farther on, beyond the tributary, are the Black Suburb, Agramatcha, the rocky cliffs on which it stands, and the river that, for thousands of years, has been flowing under them,

towards the remote South, towards the lower reaches of the Don, and where a young Tartar prince perished who was said to be the favourite son of some famous devastator of the Russian land: about him, too, one wants to invent something and to say it in verse; he is said to have been chastised by the miraculous ikon of Our Lady which is still to be found in the most ancient of all our churches, standing above the river just opposite Agramatcha—that miraculous image before which burn undying ikon-lights, where some woman in a dark shawl is ever kneeling in prayer pressing the thumb and the two first fingers to her forehead and staring persistently and dolefully at the dusky-golden casing as it glistens dully in the warm light of the ikon-lamp, showing through its holes the narrow blackish brown right hand, just like a strip of wood, pressed to the breast, and a little higher up the small and equally dark medieval Face, humbly and sorrowfully bent towards the left shoulder, under the silver-laced prickly little crown consisting of diamonds, pearls, and rubies sparkling minutely and variedly. . . . Then I wander mentally in the centre of the town, I see the old chandlers' shops and groceries smelling of lemons and cloves, reminding me of those wire-netted bottles which my father used to bring to Kamenka,—and here I am suddenly overwhelmed by great fondness for him, for my mother, for Baskakov whom I used to love so much and have already so shamefully

forgotten. And beyond the river, beyond the town, stretching wide over an unfathomable plain lies Riverside, visible, like the other suburbs, from several streets of the town that slope towards the river: it is really a town in itself with many vagabonds, desperadoes, and a whole railway kingdom, where, by day and by night, calling forth a yearning to travel far away, away where the flights of geese are now filing under the cold and gloomy sky, the locomotives are commandingly and appealingly, sadly and freely, echoing in the icy, resonant air. There lies the station, which also torments one with its odours—of fried patties, of samovars, of coffee—blended with the smell of coal smoke, that is, of the trains which, by day and night, are setting off for every part of Russia. . . .

I remember not a few such days, scant and short, which gave one a bitter-sweet torment, by the cosiness of home and by dreams, now of the town's antiquity, now of the free autumnal expanses one saw from it. These days dragged endlessly amid the boredom of the class-room at school, where I had perforce to learn all that men were supposed to know; then in the silence of two warm commonplace rooms, their quietude heightened not only by the sleepy tick of the alarm-clock on Lyubov Andreevna's chest of drawers covered with a little knitted napkin and surmounted by a wedding-casket, but also by the minute crackling of bobbins in the hands of Manya and Xyusha who sat the

livelong day making lace;—they dragged on slowly and monotonously, and suddenly were cut short: on some particularly sad dusky evening the gate outside would unexpectedly bang, then the door in the passage, the one in the anteroom, and suddenly on our threshold, brightening the whole house with light and joy, my father would appear in his furry ear-cap and unbuttoned raccoon pelisse, and I would run towards him hot-foot and throw myself on his neck, stinging with my kisses his lovely warm lips beneath the cold and frost-moistened moustache, and feeling with rapture: Lord, how unlike he is anybody else in the world! How quite, quite different from all the rest!

## VIII

THE street in which we lived ran the whole length of the town. Our part of it was empty and deserted, consisting of merchants' stone houses which seemed uninhabited. Its middle part, by contrast, was very animated—here it adjoined the market, and had all the proper accompaniments of taverns, arcades, high-class shops and hotels, including the one that stood at the corner of the Long—the Nobles' Hotel, which wasn't called so for nothing: its only guests were landowners, and through its basement windows the passers-by smelt the sweet odour proper to a restaurant kitchen, saw the chefs



in white caps, and through the glass entrance door—a gently sloping and wide staircase carpeted in red.

My father, during my school years, was living through his last rise, his last ruin: having removed to Baturino, mortgaged it, and sold Kamenka to a well-to-do Rozhdestvo peasant—all this with a pretence of wise economic forethought—he once more felt himself a rich gentleman, and therefore, on his visits to town, he would again stay only at the Nobles', always occupying the best room. Thus when he used to come I would be removed, for two or three days, from Rostovtsev's house into a quite different world, once more becoming for a time a little gentleman to whom everybody smiled and bowed—the cabmen before the door, the porter at the entrance, the valets, the maids, and even the clean-shaven Mikheich himself in his large tail-coat, and white tie, a former serf of the Prince Shchremetev who had in the course of his life tasted everything—Paris, Rome, St. Petersburg, Moscow—and now, sad and dignified, was whiling away his life as valet in an out-of-the-way town, in some Nobles' Hotel where even the real gentlemen now only pretended to be such, and the rest were mere "district *monchers*" as he called them, people with exaggeratedly gentlemanlike manners, with suspiciously insolent exactingness, with voices that were low because of vodka rather than breeding.

"Good morning, Alexander Sergeich," the cabmen would shout each other before the entrance to the Nobles' Hotel. "Will you tell us to wait,—maybe you'll want to go to the circus to-night?"

And my father, who could not help feeling the falsity of his acting as the former man of wealth, was nevertheless pleased by these cries, and gave instructions to wait, although there were always plenty of cabs near the Nobles' and therefore no sense whatever in paying for waiting.

Behind the glass entrance door it was very warm, unusually and excitingly bright with glowing lamps, and one was at once pleasantly enwrapped in all that nice, gentlemanly atmosphere proper to old provincial hotels for the nobles, for the conferences and meetings of the nobility. From the ground-floor corridor which led to the restaurant came loud voices and laughter, some one shouted: "Mikheich, do tell the Count, devil take you, that we're waiting for him!" And on the staircase leading to the first floor, a giant in a huge fur pelisse would meet us and suddenly stop, give a surprised exclamation, roll his cold vulture eyes with feigned joy and kiss with courtly urbanity my mother's hand; he resembled at once a peasant and an old Russian prince, and my father would instantly emulate his society manner, firmly shaking his hand:

"Please, please, do drop in, Prince. We'll be very glad!"

And in the corridor would be walking a short-legged, stocky young man in *poddiovka*, in high-collared cambric shirt, with sleek whitish hair and protruding eyes, bright-blue and always drunken-looking,—a certain Misha Stankevich who would shout from afar in a loud hoarse voice, in a hurried and extremely intimate manner (though he was practically no relation of ours at all):

“Dear Uncle, what ages! And I heard them say: ‘Arseniev, Arseniev,’ but knew not whether it was you. . . . Good evening, dear Aunt,” he would keep on saying, *holding* my mother’s hand in such an intimate way that she was compelled to kiss him back on the temple —“Good evening, Alexander,” he would turn eagerly to me calling me, nearly always, by a wrong name, “you look as fit as a fiddle. As for me, you see, Uncle, this is already the fifth day I’ve been sitting here waiting for that beast Krichevsky—he promised to lend me some money to pay the bank, and he himself, devil knows what for, has bolted off to Warsaw and goodness only knows when he’ll be back. . . . What about you, have you already had dinner? If not, let’s go downstairs, there’s a whole gathering there. . . .”

My father would kiss him heartily, and suddenly, for no earthly reason, unexpectedly even to himself, he would invite him to our room, take him there and with great animation order Mikheich an incredible quantity of hors-d’oeuvres, dishes, vodkas,

and wines. What a dreadful lot and how greedily that Misha ate and drank. How, noisily and ceaselessly he talked, ejaculated, laughed, wondered. I can still hear his hoarse shouting, his ever-recurring arrogant sentence:

"But do you, Uncle, really suppose me capable of such meanness?"

In the evening we sat in the vast glacial tent of the Brothers Truzzi, which smelt pungently and pleasantly of all the things a circus usually smells of. With sharp, parrot-like vociferation, wide-trouserred clowns with floury faces and flaming orange hair flew out into the arena, accompanied by the spectators' guffaws and flopping full swing with their bellies, with sham clumsiness, into the sand; in their wake gallumphed an old white horse on whose broad hollow back galloped a short-legged woman, erect, bestrewn with golden spangles, in pink tights with pink taut thighs under her protruding ballet-skirt. . . . The band was drumming away with unheeding boldness "Willow, willow, my green one"; the handsome black-bearded director, dressed in tail-coat, buskins and top-hat, standing in the middle of the arena and whirling round, was rhythmically and wonderfully cracking his long whip; the horse stiffly and obstinately arching his neck, all curved aslant, galloped heavily along the very edge of the circle; the woman was expectantly tautening on his back and then, all of a sudden, with a curt coquettish shout, jumped

up and with a cracking noise broke through the paper hoop which the grooms in doublets had flung up before her. . . . And when, trying to look lighter than down, she at last got off the horse back on to the trodden sand of the arena, curtsied with the utmost grace, waved her little hands, twisting them in some peculiar way, and, accompanied by a storm of applause, vanished with an affected childishness behind the wings, the music suddenly stopped short (although the clowns, gadding floppily about the arena with an air of forlorn idiots, shouted rolling their r's: "Try again!"), and the whole circus gasped in delighted horror: the grooms ran out in terrible flurry to the arena, dragging behind them a huge iron cage, and from behind the wings was heard suddenly a monstrous rolling roar as if someone were being there abominably sick, and it was followed by such a powerful, kingly breathing that the whole tent of the Brothers Truzzi shook to its very pegs. . . .

## IX

AFTER the departure of my father and mother, it seemed as if Lent had descended on the town.

And somehow they often left on a Saturday, so that on the same evening I had to go to vespers to the church of the Elevation of the Cross situated in one of the desolate lanes near our school.

And heavens! How well I remember those quiet sad evenings of late autumn under its low gloomy vaults! As a rule we would be brought long before the beginning of the service, and have to wait a long time in its tense stillness and twilight. There is no one but us—only the figures of a few old women kneeling in the corners, and not a sound but the whispering of their prayers and the slow crackling of the few candles and ikon-lights before the altar. The twilight steadily darkens, behind the narrow windows the dying evening turns blue and purple, ever sadder and sadder. . . . And then come the soft footsteps of the priests, in warm cassocks and high goloshes, walking through to the altar. But after that again the stillness, the expectation, lasts for a long time; mysterious preparations go forward at the altar, behind the Holy Gate upholstered with red silk; then, upon its opening—which is always a little unexpected and terrifying—a long and silent incensing of the altar-table, until at last the deacon comes out to the pulpit calling out with a sustained solemnity: "Arise!"—until from the depth of the altar he is answered by the humble and sad inaugural voice: "Glory to the Holy and Consubstantial and Vivifying and Undivided Trinity"—and until this voice is drowned by the still, concordant music of the choir: "Amen. . . ."

How it all moves me! I am still a boy, an adolescent, but then I was born endowed with the sense of all this, and during the last years I have so many

times passed through that expectation, that tense silence preceding the service, so many times heard those exclamations and the "amen" that unfailingly follows them and drowns them, that the whole thing has become, as it were, part of my soul, and my soul, divining beforehand every word of the service, now gives a double response to everything, intensified by its expectation. "Glory to the Holy and Consubstantial . . ."—I hear the pleasant familiar voice coming faintly from the altar, and a sweet tremor runs through my whole body, and the rest of the service I stand as if bewitched.

"O come, let us worship God our King! O come let us worship. . . ." "Bless the Lord, O my soul," I hear whilst the priest, preceded by the deacon with a taper, quietly walks about the church, silently filling it with whiffs of the incense fragrance, and bowing to the ikons; and tears dim my eyes, for already I know with certainty that there is, and can be, nothing more beautiful or loftier on earth than all this; that even if what Glebochka said was true when he asserted, on the authority of some ill-shaven schoolboys from the upper forms, that God did not exist, all the same nothing can be better than what I feel now as I listen to these ejaculations and chants, and gaze now at the little red flames before the dull-golden wall of the old ikonostasis, now at the Lord's holy warrior, the godly Prince Alexander Nevsky painted full-length in complete warrior's armour, in helmet

and coat-of-mail, on the gilded pillar near me, one hand pressed to his heart in token of God's fear and veneration, and his menacing and pious eyes lifted heavenward. . . .

And on and on flows the holy mystery. The Holy Gate is closed and opened alternately, symbolising now our ejection from the Paradise lost by us, now the new contemplation thereof; wonderful Light-Prayers are recited, giving vent to our sorrowful awareness of our earthly weakness, helplessness, and our eagerness to be led along the path of God; the vaults of the church grow brighter and warmer with the light of many candles lit in token of the human expectation of the Saviour's advent, symbolising the illumination of human hearts with hope, and a firm belief in God's bounties is sounded in the earthly requests of the great liturgical prayer: "For the peace from above, and for the salvation of our souls. . . . For the peace of the whole world, and the welfare of God's holy churches. . . ." And then again that feeble, humble voice which peacefully resolves everything: "For unto Thee are due all glory, honour and worship, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, now and ever and unto ages of ages. . . ."

No, it is not true, what I said about Gothic cathedrals, about the organs: I never wept in those cathedrals as I did in the tiny church of the Elevation of the Cross on those dark lonely evenings, after seeing off my father and mother, and entering,



virtually as into one's paternal home, under its low vaults, into its silence, warmth and twilight, standing weary under them in my long school-uniform and listening to the sorrowfully humble, "Let my prayer be fulfilled," or to the deliciously drawling, "O Kindly Light—holy glory of the immortal—Heavenly Father—of holy, blessed—Jesus Christ. . ."—mentally intoxicated by the vision of some mystical sunset which I pictured to myself when I heard it recited: "Having come to the setting of the sun, having seen the evening light. . ."; or kneeling in that sad and mysterious moment when once more a profound silence enfolds the whole church for a while, the candles are once more extinguished, plunging it into the old-testamental nocturnal darkness, and then would begin as if from afar, drawling, cautious, hardly audible, portending the dawn: "Glory to God in the highest—and on earth peace—goodwill towards men. . ."—with those passionately dolorous and yet blissful thrice-repeated cries in the middle: "Blessed art Thou O Lord; teach me Thy statutes!"

What was it that filled my eyes with those hot exalted tears to which I surrendered with such ecstasy, though even in those days I had in me a strain of strength, restraint, and reticence? Chiefly, perhaps, a certain melancholy foresight which secretly dawned upon me in those moments; a foresight not only of the whole of my own future destiny, but of any human destiny too. . . .

## X

AND then I remember many hard, grey, wintry days, many obscure and dirty thaws, when Russian provincial life would become particularly painful, when everybody's faces would turn gloomy, hostile—a Russian is primitively subject to the influence of nature!—and everything in the world, just as one's own existence, tormented one by its futility, aimlessness. . . .

I recall impenetrable Asiatic snowstorms, raging sometimes for whole weeks on end through which the town belfries barely loomed. I recall the Epiphany frosts which made one think of most ancient times of Russia, of the colds which made "the earth crackle seven feet deep": then, at night, over the snow-white town, all drowned in snow-drifts there blazed menacingly in the raven-black sky the white constellation of Orion, and by day, crystalline and sinister, shone two dull suns, and in the taut and resonant immobility of the burning air the whole town was slowly and wildly besmirched with livid smoke from the chimneys, and creaked and screamed all over with the footsteps of the pedestrians, with the runners of the peasants' broad and low carting sledges, whilst the breath of the shaggy horses, hoar-frosted up to their eyes, and of the peasants looking just the same, walking woodenly beside them with whips, their hands in huge yellow leather gloves, came

out in whiffs of white vapour. . . . During one such frost the mendicant idiot Dunya froze to death on the cathedral parvis; for half a century she had roamed the town, and the town which had always giped at her with the utmost ruthlessness, suddenly gave her an almost royal funeral, which made Rostovtsev recite to us, by the way of edification, one of the cruellest, peculiarly Russian pages from the life of St. Procopius which ran something like this:

*"There was a winter, of all winters by far the cruellest. There was an unbearable frost and stormy wind, and snow fell heavy on the ground and covered men's dwellings; and not only on the roads, but in the city too, beasts and men froze in countless numbers, and birds fell dead upon the roofs. And in those days it befell that the Saint, his body almost naked, endured dire sufferings because of that winter. Once, at night-time, he came to the dwellings of the poor and u. shed to warm himself there; but, feeling him come, some shut their doors before him, and others struck him shouting: 'Be off, be off! Thou fool!' In a corner he found some dogs lying on snow and straw, and he himself lay in their midst, but the dogs fled from him. And the Saint went back to Church and sat, bent and tottering, despairing of salvation. Blessed be the Lord's name! Men and dogs are alike in fury and in mind. . . ."*

Strange as it may seem, immediately after this then comes to my mind a ball at the girls' school—

the first ball I went to. The weather was again very frosty. Returning home with Glebochka after school, we intentionally took the street in which the girls' school was situated; in its courtyard the snow-drifts bordering the drive that led to the main entrance were already being levelled out and planted with two rows of extremely thick and fresh fir-trees. The sun was setting, everything looked clean, youthful and rose-coloured—the snowy street, the snow-laden roofs, the walls of the houses, their window-panes shining with golden mica, and the air itself, also youthful, strong, penetrating one's breast like exhilarating ether. On the way we met schoolgirls coming from their school, dressed in fur-coats and shod with high-goloshes, wearing pretty hats and bonnets, with long frost-silvered eyelashes and radiant eyes, and some of them said in full, clear, affable tones as they passed: "Welcome to the ball!"—troubling one by that full clear tone, rousing in me the first feeling for something which lay behind those fur-coats, goloshes, and bonnets, in those tender excited faces, in the long frosted eyelashes and quick ardent glances—the feeling that was afterwards to possess me with such force. . . .

Long after the ball I felt intoxicated by recollections of it and of myself—of that elegant, handsome, light, deft schoolboy in a new blue uniform and white gloves who, with such a joyously brave chill in his heart, mixed with the dense and elegant

girlish throng, ran about the corridors and staircases, drank endless almond syrups in the refreshment-room, glided among the dancers on the floor sprinkled with some glistening powder, in the big white hall flooded with the pearly light of the lustres, and echoing from the choirs with triumphantly resonant thunders of the military band, breathing in all that fragrant ardour with which the balls drug the novice, and enchanted by every tiny shoe he came across, by every white cape, every black velvet ribbon on the neck, every silk bow in the braid, by every youthful breast heaving in blissful dizziness after a waltz . . . .

## XI

WHILE in the third form I once displayed an insolence towards the headmaster for which I nearly got expelled. During a Greek lesson, while the master was explaining something to us, writing it on the board, chalking it down firmly, skilfully—and feeling greatly pleased with his own skill—I, instead of listening to him, was re-reading for the hundredth time one of my favourite pages in the *Odyssey*—about Nausicaa going with her handmaids to the shore to wash the yarn. Suddenly the headmaster entered the class-room; he was in the habit of walking in the corridors and peeping through the door-glasses; he made straight for me, snatched the book from my hands and shouted furiously:

"Go into the corner till the end of the lesson!"

I rose up, turning pale and answered:

"Don't shout at me, I'm not a boy . . . "

Indeed, I no longer felt myself a boy. I was rapidly growing up, mentally and bodily, and was myself aware of that growth—and the dream of life was taking on for me more and more sober outlines. The visions of that dream now no longer possessed me with the same force, their impressions did not weigh on me to the same extent as before. I no longer lived only by feelings; I had acquired a certain mastery over them, began to discriminate what I saw and took in, began to look as if from above at the things that surrounded me—and those I lived through. No longer could I be intoxicated so easily by everything or at any moment. Something of the kind I had already experienced at the transition from childhood to boyhood. Now I was living through it with redoubled force, and often, wandering on holidays about the town with Glebochka, through the suburbs and Riverside—wandering already freely, independently,—I would notice that my stature was almost that of an average passer-by, that only my adolescent's leanness, slenderness and slimness, and fineness and freshness of the beardless face distinguished me from those passers-by.

Early in September of the year when I passed into the fourth form, one of my school-fellows, a certain Vadim Lopukhin suddenly expressed a

desire to make friends with me. One day, during the long break, he approached me, took my arm just above the elbow and said, looking straight and blankly into my eyes:

"Look here, would you like to join our club? We have formed a club of nobles' sons, so as not to mix any longer with all the Arkhipovs and Zausai-  
lovs. See?"

He was in every respect older than I, for in every form he invariably sat for two years; and he already had the tallness of a grown youth, broad-boned, fair-haired, with light-coloured eyes, with a golden moustache struggling through. One had the impression that he already knew everything, had experienced everything, one felt his viciousness, and also that he was proud of it as a sign of *bon ton* and his own grown-upness: during recreation he strolled absently and rapidly amid the crowd with his well-bred, easy, rather springy and shuffling gait, thrusting his body forward nonchalantly and insolently, his hands in the pockets of his wide light trousers, all the time whistling and gazing round him with cold and somewhat mocking curiosity; for a chat he approached only people of his own set, and on meeting the inspector nodded to him familiarly. . . . By that time I had already begun to take an interest in people; in watching them, my likings and dislikings began to take shape, and I divided people into certain categories, some of which for ever became loathsome to me. Lopukhin

certainly belonged to the loathsome. And yet I was flattered and gave whole-hearted assent to the idea of the club, whereupon he offered to take me the same night to the municipal gardens:

"First you must get to know some of our chaps better," he said, "and secondly, I'll introduce you to Nalya R. She's still a school-girl, the daughter of very stuck-up people, but she already knows what's what, is clever as a devil, gay as a French-woman, and quite able to drink a bottle of champagne without any help. She herself is small, and her feet are like fairy's. . . . See?" he said looking as usual into my eyes and thinking, or pretending to think, of something else.

And now, immediately after that talk something quite extraordinary happened to me: for the first time in my life I suddenly felt not only that I was in love with this Nalya, whom I imagined to myself according to Lopukhin's description—this being in love no longer resembling that fleeting, light, mysterious and beautiful thing that had once touched me at the sight of Sashka, and afterwards at the meeting of young Rostovtsev with that girl in the garden on the Tsar's name-day—but already something which was also virile and physical. How tremblingly I awaited the evening! There it was, I fancied—at last! What "at last," and what was it really? Some fatal and seemingly long-coveted line which at last I, too, had to overstep, the uncanny threshold of some sinful paradise.



. . . And already I felt as if everything was to happen, or at least to begin, that very night. I went to the hairdresser, who cut my hair *en brosse*, and after scenting me, combed it up with a round brush smelling of grease and spice; I spent nearly an hour in washing, dressing up and cleaning myself at home, and as I made my way to the garden I felt my hands grow ice-cold and my ears ablaze. In the garden there was again music, the tall gushing fountain was spouting its cool powder, and it smelt, in a femininely luxurious way, of flowers in the crisp icy air of the purple autumn sunset; but there were only a few people about, which made me still more ashamed of walking aloof, in everybody's sight, in that select group of nobles' sons, and of keeping up with them some special noble-men's conversation—when something suddenly struck me, as it were: in the avenue, there walked swiftly towards us, with minute steps, a cane in her hand, a little woman-girl, extremely well-formed and very neatly and simply dressed. Rapidly she approached us, and, making affable play with her agate eyes, she freely and firmly shook our hands, her own small hand in a tight black glove, and began talking and laughing fast, once or twice throwing a fleeting but curious glance at myself; and I, for the first time in my life, became so vividly and sensuously aware of all that peculiar and terrible something which lurks in the lips of a laughing woman, in the child-like intonation of

a woman's voice, in the roundness of a woman's shoulders, in the slimness of a woman's waist, in that inexpressible something which there is even in a woman's ankle—that I could not utter one word.

"Take him in hand a little, Nalya," said Lopukhin, quietly and insolently nodding at me, with a smile in his inexpressive eyes, and alluding with such unabashed significance to something, that I was seized with cold shivers and my teeth nearly chattered. . . . Fortunately, in a few days, Nalya left for the county town—her uncle, our vice-governor, suddenly died. Fortunately too, nothing came of the club. Besides, a great event soon befell our family: my brother George was arrested.

## XII

**EVEN** my father was dumbstruck by this event.

It is now impossible even to imagine how in the old days the average Russian looked upon anyone who dared to "go against the Tsar", whose image, notwithstanding the continual pursuit of Alexander II ending in his murder, still remained as the image of "earthly God" and aroused a mystical reverence in people's hearts and minds. There was something mystical, too, in the way people uttered the word "socialist"—it implied deep disgrace and horror, being associated with the conception of every kind of villainy. When the news spread that "socialists"

had appeared even in our parts—the brothers Rogachev, the Subbotin girls—this struck our family as if plague or biblical leprosy had befallen the district. Then something still more dreadful happened: it turned out that the son of our nearest neighbour—no longer some Rogachev or Subbotin, but a man really of our own set—had suddenly disappeared from St. Petersburg, where he was studying at the Military Medical Academy, had then made his appearance in the neighbourhood of Elets at a water-mill, as an ordinary labourer, in bast-shoes and hempen shirt, with a long shaggy beard, and before long had been recognised, charged with ‘propaganda’—this word, too, had a dreadful sound—and incarcerated in the St. Peter and Paul fortress. Our father was no obscurantist, and far from timid in any way; on more than one occasion had I heard him, when a child, insolently call Nicholas I “Nicholas the Flogger” and “upstart”; yet next day I also heard him solemnly, and just as sincerely, utter something quite different: “His Majesty the Emperor Nicholas Pavlovich reposing in God. . . .” With my father everything depended on his lordly mood—and which, after all, did prevail? That is why even he could merely shrug his shoulders disconcertedly when that bearded young porter was “seized.”

“Poor Feodor Mikhailovich!” he said with horror, referring to the father. “Probably this what-d’ye call-him will be hanged. Most certainly he will,”

he would say, with his usual fondness for a striking situation. "And serve him right, serve him right! I'm sorry for the old man, but one mustn't stand on ceremony with them. Otherwise we'll bounce upon something like the French Revolution! And wasn't I right when I said, 'Remember my word, that stiff-necked, morose duffer will end as a convict, a disgrace to his whole family!'"

And here the same disgrace, the same horror, had suddenly befallen our own family. How? Why? After all my brother could by no means be called a "stiff-necked, morose duffer". His "criminal activity" sounded still more absurd, still more incredible than that of the Subbotin girls, who, even though they belonged to a wealthy and good aristocratic family and had been brought up in the best of aristocratic traditions, might simply have been led astray, in girlish folly, by people like the Rogachevs. . . .

What did my brother's "activity" consist of, and how exactly he spent his University years, I do not really know. Amazingly little do we all know about each other, about the life even of those nearest to us! Who will dare to assert that he knows enough of the life of his father, mother, sisters, brothers, that he had taken a due interest in them, was attentive to them whilst they were with him in life? I only know that this activity had begun when he was still at school, under the leadership of a "remarkable personality", a seminary student

called Dobrokhotov. But what my brother had in common with Dobrokhotov? True, my brother, telling me about him afterwards, still admired him, spoke about his "austere rigour", his iron will, his "ruthless hatred of autocracy and self-denying love for the people"; and certainly these were the features (except, of course, the "self-denying love") which characterised Dobrokhotov. But did my brother possess even a single one of them? And whence came his admiration? Obviously just because of that everlasting light-headedness, the enthusiasm so characteristic of the Russian nobility and which the Radischevs, the Chatskys, the Rudins, the Ogariovs, the Herzens never gave up, even in their old age; because Dobrokhotov's qualities were deemed to be lofty, heroic; and finally for the simple reason that, recalling Dobrokhotov, he recalled all that happy festive atmosphere amid which his youth had been flowing—the festive awareness of that youth, of the criminal, and therefore sweetly uncanny, participation in all the secret conventicles, the holiday atmosphere of gatherings, of songs, of "seditious" speeches, of dangerous plans and undertakings. . . .

That everlasting Russian need of holiday! How sensuous we are, how we crave to be intoxicated with life—not merely delighted, but just intoxicated—how we are allured by constant intoxication, by fits of drunkenness, how bored we are with everyday life and with regular work! How amazingly

unlike we are (for example) to the French, a people certainly no less passionate than we, no less versed in pleasure, but who have already learned to know the limit and measure in everything, who no longer claim the impossible from life, who have long ago been taught by bitter experience that no good will come out of it however much you may drink, smoke, make rows, torment yourself and other people with passionate effusions, and that one must be just as sparing of one's mental and bodily energy as of centimes, which are not at all easily obtainable in this world unless one plunders from one's neighbour the plundered goods, unless in general one lives at the expense of others, unless one does nothing but ask one's friends for a cigarette or a franc.

Russia in my time lived an extraordinarily ample and active life; the number of her sound, strong, working people went on growing. Yet wasn't it the traditional Russian dream of rivers flowing with milk, of unfettered freedom, of holiday, that was one of the main causes, for instance, of the Russian revolution? And what, generally speaking, is a Russian protestant, a rebel, a revolutionary, always ridiculously severed from reality and despising it, unwilling to submit himself in the slightest measure to reason, to calculation, to inconspicuous, unhurried, unobtrusive activity? What! to serve in the governor's office, to contribute one's miserable share to public business! Not for worlds—"the coach, give me the coach!"

For my brother, both at school and in the University, a brilliant scholarly future was predicted. But did he then think of scholarship? He had, you see, to "renounce entirely all personal life, to devote himself to the suffering people " He was a kind, noble, bright, good-hearted youth, and yet in this he simply lied to himself, or rather tried to live—and actually lived—upon fictitious emotions, as did thousands of others. What was the general reason for this "mingling with the people" on the part of youthful noblemen, for their revolt against their own set, for their conventicles, discussions, clandestine activity, their bloodthirsty words and deeds? In fact the children were flesh of the flesh, bone of the bone of their fathers, who had also been dissipating their lives in every way. Ideas were all very well; but in those youthful revolutionaries how much was there also of the mere longing for gay idleness under the cloak of hectic activity, of self-intoxication with meetings, noise, songs, all sorts of clandestine dangers—and this "arm in arm" with the pretty Subbotin girls—with dreams of police searches and prisons, of sensational trials and companionable journeys to Siberia, to penal servitude, to the other side of the Arctic circle! What induced my brother, whose excellent achievements both at school and in the University were due entirely to his quite uncommon abilities, to devote all the ardour of his youth to those "clandestine activities"? The bitter lot of

Pila and Sysoika? No doubt, reading about it, he shed tears more than once. But why, then, like all his fellow-revolutionaries, did he never notice either Pila or Sysoika in real life, in Novoselki, in Baturino? In many a thing he was a son of his father who would say very appropriately, after a couple of glasses of vodka:

"No, splendid! I love drinking. It rejuvenates!"

"Rejuvenates"—the word had been once upon a time used at the distilleries, and the man who had drunk meant by it that something young and joyous entered into him, that there was going on within him a certain sweet fermentation, a release from reason, from the bonds and rules of everyday life. So the peasants say of vodka: "Why then, it brings about the loosening inside a man!" The famous dictum: "Russia's joy is in drinking" is by no means so simple as it may seem. Aren't the foolery, and the tramping; the ritual orgies, the self-burnings, and all sorts of revolts akin to that "joy"—or even that amazing picturesqueness, that verbal sensuality for which Russian literature is so famous?

### XIII

My brother was for a long time in hiding, changing residence, living under an assumed name. Then, when he decided that the danger was over, he came



to take a rest in Baturino. But here, on the following day, he was arrested: his arrival had been reported by the estate agent of one of our neighbours.

It is remarkable that the same morning as the gendarmes came to Baturino, that agent was killed by a tree which upon his instructions was being felled in the garden. Thus there always has dwelt in my mind the picture which I had then imagined: the vast tree already thinned by autumn, picturesquely defaced by the autumn rain storms and first frosts, bespattered with rotting leaves, its trunks and branches blackened and with motley remnants of its yellow and red garb; a fresh bright morning; the dazzling sunlight glittering on the lawns and descending in warm golden pillars among the distant trunks into the damp coolness and shadow of the ground, into the thin smoke of the still lingering morning mist shining ethereally blue; the crossing of two avenues, and there an old, splendid, widespread maple-tree displaying the transparence of its huge open crown, the black pattern of its branches, with here and there large notched lemon-coloured leaves hanging on them, against the moist morning sky; its mighty trunk, petrified with age, was being cleft deeper and deeper by the axes of some shirt-clad peasants, their caps cocked backwards, uttering cries of delight, whilst the agent, his hands deep in his pockets, was looking up at the tree's top trembling in the sky. Maybe he was thinking of the cunning

way in which he had hoodwinked the Socialist? And suddenly the tree cracked; its top jerked abruptly forward—and with a noise, gradually gaining speed, weight and horror, it hurled itself at him through the branches of the neighbouring trees. . . .

I have often been to that estate since. It used once to belong to our mother. My father, who had an insatiable passion for getting rid of everything, had long ago sold it and eaten up the proceeds. Upon the death of the new owner it passed to some grand lady living in Moscow, and was forsaken: the land was being leased out to the peasants, and the manor left to God's will. And often, passing by on the highway, from which it was only about half-a-mile distant, I would turn off, ride down the broad oak alley which led to it, reach the spacious courtyard, leave the horse by the stables, and walk up to the house. . . . How many deserted manors and orchards there are in Russian literature, and how fondly have they always been described! Why does the Russian soul thus rejoice in waste, wilderness, ruin, decay? I would walk up to the house, pass the garden that rose behind it. . . . Stables, servants' cottages, granaries and other outhouses scattered about the desolate courtyard—all was huge, grey, all was going to rack and ruin and growing wild; and overgrown with weeds and bushes, the kitchen-gardens, the farmyards, which stretched beyond them and merged into the

field, were going wild likewise. The wooden house covered with grey deal-boards was of course rotting and dilapidated, growing yearly more and more fascinating, and I was especially fond of peeping through its windows with their minutely grated frames. . . . How can one convey the sensation one feels in such moments, when one peeps stealthily, profanely, as it were, into an old empty house, into the speechless and mysterious sanctum of its remote, vanished life! And the garden behind the house was of course half cut out, though there still flaunted in it many age-old lime-trees, maple-trees, silvery Italian poplars, birches and oaks, solitarily and silently whiling away in that forgotten garden their long life, their eternally youthful old age, the beauty of which seemed enhanced in that solitude and silence, in its blessed, divine purposelessness. The sky and the old trees of which each has always its own expression, its own shape, its own soul, its own thoughts—can one be sated with contemplating them? Long would I wander beneath them, not taking my eyes from their infinitely varied tops, branches, leaves, pining to understand, to divine, and forever to impress upon myself their images; I would sit thinking of them, on the spacious slope below the garden, among the huge oak stumps showing their coarse blackness amid high tender grass and flowers, over the shining ponds which still spread the full sheets of their waters at the foot of the hill in the valley. . . . How my soul would

then sever itself from life, with what sad and kind wisdom, as if from some unearthly distance, would it look upon life, contemplating human "things and deeds"! And unfailingly I would recall here both that unfortunate man killed by the old maple-tree, who perished along with it, and the miserable lot of my brother unconsciously ruined by that man, and the far-off autumn day when he was driven away from Baturino to the town by two bearded gendarmes who looked like Alexander the Third, to that very jail where once I had been so struck by the dismal prisoner gazing from behind the iron grating at the declining sun. . . .

My father and mother drove that day to the town in the wake of my brother's official carriage, quite beside themselves. Mother could not even cry, her dark eyes burned with a dry terrible flame. Father tried to look neither at her nor at me, smoked all the time and kept on repeating:

"Stuff and nonsense! Believe me—in a few days all this rubbish will be straightened out. . . ."

On the same night my brother was taken further on, to Kharkov, the centre of the clandestine group for belonging to which he had been arrested. We went to the station to see him off. I was chiefly struck I think by the fact that on arriving at the station we had to go to the third-class waiting-room, where, watched over by the gendarmes, he was awaiting the departure of the train, no longer allowed to sit with ordinary, respectable, free people,

already deprived of the liberty to dispose of himself, of the possibility of drinking tea or eating patties with them. And as soon as we entered that stinking, hideously disorderly, crowded, noisy room, I was literally heart-stricken by his look, by the sense of his being a prisoner, a man set apart and devoid of rights: he himself understood it well too, and was aware of all his humiliation; he smiled guiltily, ill at ease. He sat lonely in the farthest corner by the door leading to the platform, youthfully attractive and pathetic in his cleanliness and slenderness, his light grey suit, over which my father's raccoon fur-coat was thrown. Next to him there was an empty space,—the gendarmes now and again dispersed peasants and townsmen who thronged around, and looked with fearful curiosity at this live Socialist—thank God, already caged! Particular curiosity was shown by a village priest, tall, in a high beaver cap and deep dusty goloshes, who kept his wide-open eyes fixed on him and in a mysterious gibber poured out questions to the gendarmes, which they didn't answer. They looked upon my brother as a naughty boy whom, willy-nilly, they had to watch and to deliver where they were told to, and one of them, with a kind condescending smile, said to my mother:

"Don't you be anxious, Madam; everything, please God, will be all right. . . . Come here and sit with us, it's still twenty minutes before the train leaves. . . . Now my assistant will presently go to

fetch some boiling water, and buy for the gentleman anything you may order for him to eat on the way. . . . You did well to give the gentleman a fur-coat—it'll be chilly at night in the carriage. . . ."

I remember that here my mother at last started to weep—she sat down on the bench next to my brother and suddenly began to sob, pressing her mouth with a handkerchief, while my father, making a sickened grimace, waved his hand and walked swiftly away. He could not bear sufferings and vexations, and he always, by way of instinctive self-defence, hastened to evade them somehow—he even avoided any partings if they were in the least painful, always suddenly cutting them short, hastily frowning and muttering that a drawn-out parting meant more tears. He went to the refreshment-room, drank several glasses of vodka, went to look for the colonel of the station gendarmerie to ask permission for my brother to travel first class. . . . He came back only at the very last, the terrible moment, when, with relentless roar and noise, that fatal Kharkov train had already swept down upon us. . . .

#### XIV

THAT night I felt nothing, it seems, beyond an embarrassed bewilderment. My brother had been driven away, my father and mother gone. . . . It took me some considerable time after this to live down my new mental distress.

My father and mother for some reason went away the very next morning. It was a sunny day, such as often occur with us in October, but even in the town one was chilled right through by the sharp north wind, and everything looked extraordinarily clean, bright, and spacious—the gaps of the streets, the vista of the empty surroundings seemingly quite devoid of air, the bright sky shining here and there with a sharp bluish-green between the swiftly sailing opaque white clouds. . . . I saw my parents as far as the monastery and the jail, between which the road, already frosted and hard as stone, parti-coloured by the sun and the shadows of the clouds, ran away into the cold naked fields. Here the tarantass stopped. The sun, which, whilst we were getting ready and starting off, had risen somewhat higher, was now and again peeping from behind the clouds; but its dazzling light gave no warmth, and as soon as we got into the fields the wind began to blow so piercingly from the north that the coachman on the box had to bend his head; my father had on his fur-coat and a winter cap, and his moustache waved in the wind and tears came to his eyes dimmed by the wind. I got out and my mother again began crying bitterly, pressing her warm bonnet to my face; as to my father, he merely crossed me hastily, put his cold hand to my lips and shouted into the coachman's back

“Go on!”

The tarantass, with its canopy half-raised, began at once clattering off; the mighty bay shaft-horse in the middle tossed up his head and shook the bell which pealed out under the arc; the bay trace-horses began to gallop harmoniously and freely, flinging up their croups, and for a long time I stood in the road, my eyes accompanying that canopy which instantaneously concealed from my sight the last people who were near to me; watching the hind wheels racing away, the hairy pasterns of the shaft-horse swiftly dancing between them under the bodywork of the tarantass, the shoes of the trace-horses darting-up high and lightly at its sides; for a long time I listened with anguish to the receding plaint of the bells. I stood in my light uniform coat, through which the wind insinuated itself, resisting it with my shoulder, and remembered what my father had been saying the night before during supper in our room in the Nobles' Hotel, pouring himself out some beer:

"Stuff and nonsense!" he said firmly. "Pshaw! Fiddle-de-dee! Well, they've arrested him, driven him away, and maybe they'll banish him to Siberia—most surely they will—but then nowadays there are not a few of them so banished, and in what way, let me ask, is a town like Tobolsk worse than Elets, Voronezh? After all, everything's stuff and nonsense! The evil will pass, and the good will pass, as St. Tikhon Zadonsky has said—everything will pass!"



I recalled these words, and far from feeling relieved, I was the more pained by them. Perhaps everything was really nonsense, but that nonsense was my life; and why do I feel it to have been given to me, not at all for nonsense, and not just that everything should pass and vanish without a trace? Everything is nonsense—yet because my brother had been taken away, the whole world seemed to me to have grown empty, to become huge and senseless, and in this world I now felt as sad and lonely as if I were already outside it, whereas I had to be with it, loving it and rejoicing in it! How could it be nonsense when it turned out that I loved—and had, evidently, always loved—that pleasant and pathetic “Socialist”, who had sat the night before a prisoner at the station, in his grey coat and with a raccoon’s pelisse thrown on his shoulders—and he had been taken away somewhere, deprived of freedom and happiness, severed from us and from all ordinary life? Everything in the world seemed to be as before, just as usual, and everybody was free and happy and he alone was in chains and in misery. Here, propelled by that icy and unruly wind, is some plain ruddy-brown dog running along the road to the town, trotting sideways, absorbed in its own cares; and *he* is no longer there, *he* is somewhere in the unending, empty, shining southern distance, travelling in the locked compartment of a sunlit carriage, under the escort of two armed gendarmes who are taking

him to somewhere called Kharkov. Here, its grated windows facing the monastery across the road, the yellow prison-house stands quietly against the sun, as uncanny, as different from everything else, as the one that awaits him in Kharkov, and yesterday he, too, spent several hours in that house, and to-day he isn't there any longer—one feels only the sorrowful residue of his presence. Here, from behind the high crenellated monastery-wall, the dull golden domes of the cathedral glitter marvellously in the cloud-marbled sky, and show in open-work the black branches of the old churchyard trees, and he can no longer see that beauty, nor share with me the joy of looking at them. . . . On the enormous locked monastery gate, on its folds, there were tawdry full-length paintings of two tall, sepulchrally emaciated saints in stoles, with sad greenish countenances, holding long unfolded scrolls reaching to the ground: how long have they been standing thus, for how many centuries have they been not of this world? Everything will pass; everything passes; the time will come when we shan't be of this world either—neither myself, nor my father, mother and brother—and these ancient Russian saints with their holy and wise writings in their hands will still figure just as dispassionately and sadly on the gate. . . . And taking off my cap, tears in my eyes, I began crossing myself before the gate, feeling ever more vividly with every minute my pity for myself and my brother

grow—that is, feeling ever fonder of myself, of him, of my father and mother—and ardently imploring the saints to help us, for, however painful, however sad it may be in this world, it is nevertheless beautiful, and we still crave to be happy and love each other. . . .

I went back, frequently pausing and turning round. The wind seemed to blow still stronger and colder, but the sun was rising, shining, the day grew gayer, claimed for life, for joy, and over everything—over the town, over the deserted Woodenware Place, over the sacred, silent domain of the monastery with its high wall, churchyard grove and golden cathedral cupolas, and over that boundless steppe across which, away, towards the pellucid green nothern horizon, the road ran—there sailed, in the pale-blue, watery, bright autumnal sky, large and beautiful purplish clouds, and everything was bright and motley, and over everything, light and picturesque, now and again alternating with the sun, ran airy opaque shadows. I would stand still, gaze, and then go further. . . . Where had I not been on that day!

I walked all round the town. I traversed that black suburb which sloped down from the Woodenware Place to the tanneries, crossed the decrepit humpbacked stone bridge, over the sweetly-foul tributary of the river, piled with rotting brown hides, and walked up the opposite hill to the convent—it shone against the sun with the chalky whiteness of its walls, and from its gate emerged a young

nun in coarse boots, in a rough black dress, but of such a fine, pure, old-Russian ikonographic beauty that I actually stopped short, taken aback—and then went to Agramatcha, once more descended to the tributary, and walked up to the cathedral. . . . On the cliffs behind the cathedral I stood gazing at the rotten plank roofs of the townsmen's huts below, nestling amongst the mounds along the river, at the interiors of their dirty and miserable little courtyards—and all the time thought something about human life, thought that everything passes and repeats itself, that quite probably three hundred years ago those same planky roofs were there and all sorts of weeds that grow in the wild spaces, on the clayey mounds; then mentally I saw my father and mother driving in a coach along the gleaming desolate fields; saw Baturino, where everything was so peaceful, familiar, now, of course, terribly sad, and yet unspeakably lovely and delightful; saw my brother Nicholas; the black-eyed ten-years-old Olya; our very special fir-tree before the hall windows, and the empty, bare, autumnal desolation of the garden, the unruly wind and the declining sun in it—I strove thither with all my soul, but underlying all these thoughts and feelings, I was incessantly aware of my brother. I looked at the river, which advanced in grey even ripples on the yellow cliffs, took a turning under them, and vanished in the distance; I thought again that, even in the days of Pechenegs, it had followed the same course—and

tried not to look towards Riverside, towards the station reddening on its border, from which yesterday in the dusk my brother had been taken away, not to hear the melancholy, imperious sounds of the engines as they came thence through the wind in the icy evening air. . . . How agonizingly everything that I saw and lived through on that queer day became mixed up with my brother, and most of all, it seems, that sweet rapture with which I remembered the little nun coming out of the convent gate!

For a long time afterwards I could not listen quietly to those remote station whistles—especially on waking up in the night. . . .

My mother at that time took a solemn vow of lifelong fasting for my brother's salvation, which she kept very strictly all her life, to her dying day. And God not only spared but even rewarded her: in a year's time my brother was released, and, to her great joy, was sent for three years to Baturino, to live under police supervision. . . .

## XV

IN a year's time I too obtained my freedom—I left school, and also returned under my parents' roof, there to encounter days that were doubtless the most astonishing of all I have lived through.

It was already the beginning of youth, a period astonishing to everybody, and which in my case, owing to certain happy circumstances and certain

peculiarities of mine, turned out to be particularly astonishing.

Not only did my life at that time again undergo a sharp outward change, but it was marked by one more sudden and beneficent transition, a blossoming of all my being.

Astonishing is the spring burgeoning of a tree! And how astonishing it is when the spring is harmonious, happy! Then that invisible process which is incessantly going on within it, shows itself, becomes manifest in a particularly marvellous way. Looking at the tree one morning, you are struck by the abundance of buds that have covered it during the night. And after a certain time the buds suddenly burst forth—and the black pattern of the twigs is at once strewn with countless bright-green flecks. Then the first cloud comes over, the first thunder roars, the first warm shower comes rushing down and again a miracle happens: the tree has already become so dark, so splendid in comparison with its bare tracery of yesterday, has spread out its wide glossy greenery so thick and far, stands in such beauty and strength of young firm foliage, that you simply cannot believe your eyes. . . . Something of the kind happened also to me at the time. And now there came for me too not only the full and joyous life of spring, but also those magic days—*'When in mysterious valleys, in springtide, amid swans calling, near waters shining silently, the Muse began to visit me. . . .*

Neither Lyceum gardens, nor lakes and swans of Tsarskoe Selo, none of this had been bequeathed to me, a descendant of "ruined fathers". But the great and divine novelty, the freshness and joy of "all the impressions of life", the valleys that are always and everywhere mysterious for a youthful soul, the waters shining silently, and the first, pitiful, unskilful, yet unforgettable meetings with the Muse—all this I had too. The setting in which, to use Pushkin's phrase, I was "blossoming out", was quite unlike the parks of Tsarskoe Selo. But how fascinating, how familiar Pushkin's lines about them sounded to me even then! How vividly they expressed the substance of what filled my soul—those secret swans' calls which some times resounded in it so fervently and appealingly. Does it matter what actually called them forth? Does it matter that I could not find a single word to render, to express them?

## XVI

ALL human destinies shape themselves accidentally, in unfailing dependence upon the destinies surrounding them. So also the destiny of my youth, shaped itself, determining likewise my whole destiny. As in the old quatrain—

Restored to me the roof paternal,  
Bestowed the peace of lonely steppes,  
And wonted life and circle beloved,  
And ardour of enraptur'd soul. . . .

Why did I leave school? Would my youth have been as it was, and what shape would my whole life have taken if that, at first glance insignificant, event had not happened?

My father used sometimes to say that I had left it for reasons quite inadmissibly unexpected and absurd, simply out of "lordly licence" as he was fond of putting it; he called me a self-willed whippersnapper and reproached himself for leniency to my obstinacy. But he used to say something else—his opinions were always extremely contradictory—namely, that I had acted quite "logically"—he pronounced that word with great precision and refinement—that I had acted as my nature dictated me.

"No," he would say, "Alexey's calling is neither civil service, nor uniform, nor the management of an estate, but poetry of soul and life. Besides, thank God, there is nothing to manage any longer! And here—who knows?—he might prove to be a second Pushkin or Lermontov. And why can't George be his professor? He'll know, I hope, not less than his dear daddy who, after all, in his time, also simply ran away from the Voronezh boarding school and contented himself with 'home education'. . . ."

Indeed, there were many things that went against my official education: that "licence" which was so proper in olden times in Russia, and this not only to the nobility, and of which there was not a little in my blood, and the hereditary traits of my "daddy",



and my calling for the "poetry of soul and life" which had already clearly manifested itself by that time, and finally the accidental fact of my brother being exiled not to Siberia, but to Baturino.

I had greatly changed mentally and bodily, having somehow grown at once stronger and more mature during my last year at school. Until then, I think, my mother's traits predominated in me, but now my father's began to develop rapidly—his brisk liveliness, his resistance to circumstances, to that sentimentality which was in him too, but which he always instinctively hastened to nip in the bud, his unconscious perseverance in achieving his wishes, and his waywardness. That really very unimportant thing which happened to my brother, and which at the time had appeared to all our family as something dreadful, was not lived down by me all at once; nevertheless it was, of course, lived down, and even contributed to my maturity and the revival of my forces. I felt that my father was right—"one cannot live like a weeping willow", that life was "after all, an excellent thing", as he would sometimes say when drunk, and already I saw consciously that there really was something irresistibly wonderful in verbal creation. I made up my mind definitely—to pass at all costs into the fifth form, and then get rid of school for good, return to Baturino and become "a second Pushkin or Lermontov", a Zhukovsky, a Baratynsky, my kinship with all of whom I

seemed to feel so vividly from the first moment I learned of them, and on whose portraits I looked as upon family ones.

Throughout that winter I tried to lead a working, brisk life, and in the spring there was even no need for me to try. In the course of winter something, no doubt, had happened to me—in the sense, first of all, of bodily development—as happens unexpectedly to all adolescents on whose cheeks the down starts to grow, whose limbs become rough, whose voices break. Of roughness there was, thank God, no trace in me even at that time, but the down began to grow golden already, my eyes became of brighter and richer blue, and my face, its features becoming more clearly outlined, seemed to be coated with light and healthy sunburn. Accordingly I passed my examinations in quite a different way from before. I studied for whole days, delighting in my own tirelessness and trimness, feeling with joy all that young, healthy, pure something which sometimes makes the examinations resemble the Passion Week, the fasting, the preparation for confession and communion. I would sleep for three or four hours, jump out of bed in the morning easily and quickly, wash and dress with particular care, say my prayers feeling assured that God would not fail to help me even with the aorists, leave the house with quiet firmness, tenaciously bearing in my mind and heart all that had been conquered the day before and which one now had to bring and hand over

where it belonged, steadfastly and in full. And when the whole ordeal was happily over, another joy awaited me: neither father nor mother came to fetch me this time from Baturino, but simply sent for me, as for a grown up person, a coach and pair driven by a young and giggling farm-hand who, in the course of our drive, soon became my bosom friend. And in Baturino—it was a big and rather well-to-do village with three landowners' manors lost in gardens, with several ponds and spacious commons—everything was already in blossom, turning green, enjoying the wonderful weather of late May, and suddenly I felt and realized that happy beauty, that splendour and brightness of foliage, the fullness of ponds, the mischievousness of the nightingales and frogs—already as a youth, with sensuous fullness and force. . . .

In summer, Heaven knows why, my brother Nicholas got married, thus throwing the helve after the hatchet, renouncing all his dreams and hopes, all his abilities and aspirations. What did he not dream of becoming? Actually he gave himself up to one thing only—to sweet rustic idleness and to love-affairs. When he grew tired of both, he suddenly decided to marry, and he wedded, without love, a girl he hardly knew, daughter of a plain German, steward of a Government estate in Vasilievskoe. . . . I think that this quite senseless marriage, the holiday into which it turned the whole summer for us, my participation in all this, which

after all was a sort of love-affair, and then the presence in the house of a young woman, also contributed a good deal towards my quick development.

Soon after that, unexpectedly—quite unexpectedly, without any warning—my brother George came to Baturino—the week before he himself did not expect to be released. It was a bright evening; the radiant sun was peacefully and cheerfully vanishing behind the outhouses of the manor; the courtyard smelt already of cooling grass; in its wistful evening beauty, as an old idyllic picture, rose our old house with its grey wooden pillars and steep roof; everybody was having tea on the garden verandah, and I was quietly walking down the courtyard to the stables to saddle my horse for a ride on the highway when suddenly in our rustic gate there appeared something quite unusual: a town cab! I remember to this day that peculiar jail pallor which struck me in my brother's familiar, and at the same time somehow quite new and strange, face. . . .

It was one of the happiest evenings in the life of our family, and the beginning of that peace and well-being, which were for the last time to reign for the whole three years before its end, its dispersion. . . .

## XVII

SINCE then centuries have passed, the face of the entire earth has changed. No trace has been left of Baturino—were it only for a waste of the courtyard, for a stone of the house, for a stump of the garden!—and hardly one live soul of those who shared my Baturino days. And what was there so marvellous in those days? Nothing, except their novelty to me, except my freshness and youth. The world for a short-sighted youth without ear, without flair, looks quite different from what it does to a healthy one. I could see all the seven stars of the Pleiades, hear half-a-mile off the whistling of a dormouse in the evening field; I felt drunk with the intensity with which I inhaled the scent of an autumn morning or a winter snowstorm, an old book or a lily-of-the-valley. . . . The old poet had been right:

Unspeakably divine,  
The early spring of our days,  
The only thing that's fresh, that's fragrant—  
The newness reigning in the world!

And within me the joyous, sensuous, awareness waxed ever greater and more intense.

With it I made my entry in Baturino after the examinations, with it I woke up the next day, ate and drank at tea-time, went out to the porch,

walked over the dewy grass to the stables to my Kabardinka, saw her eye joyfully light up, through the twilight, in the sunbeam, heard her happy neighing, embraced her firm glossy neck, talked to the farm-hands who were carting from the dunghill the moist sweet-smelling manure, looked at the morning May verdure, at the dense white blossoming of the orchard. . . . With the same youthful feeling I shared my brother Nicholas's drives to his sweetheart in Vasilievskoe—the free racing of the troika in the peaceful afternoon along the cart-tracks, amid the ever-thickening rye-fields, the calls of the cuckoo in the remote birch-copse still full of grass and flowers, the sight of the weird June clouds in the golden West, the blended evening odours of the village, its cottages, orchards, river, distillery, dishes being prepared for supper in the steward's house, the sharp, exhilarating sounds of the musical box played by his younger daughters, the Westphalian landscapes on the walls, the huge bunches of red-black peonies on small console-tables, all that gay German hospitality which surrounded us in that house, and the increasingly intimate proximity of that tall, lean, plain, but somehow very nice, girl, who was on the point of becoming a member of our family and was already talking to me as to a relative. . . .

Best man I could not be as yet; but the function of bride's page which I undertook did not suit me either when, dressed in a tight new glittering uni-

form, with white gloves, with beaming eyes and pomaded hair, I was fitting a white silk shoe on to her foot in its slipperly silky stocking, and afterwards drove with her in a coach, drawn by a mighty pair of greys, to Znamenie. It had been raining every day; the horses trotted spluttering about clods of blue-black mud; the full-eared, moist-laden rye-fields bent their wet grey-green spikes towards the road; now and then the low sun shone through the heavy golden shower—it was said to be the sign of a happy marriage—the windows of the coach glittering diamond-like with tear-drops of rain were pulled up; we felt squeezed within its silk-padded box and intoxicated I breathed in the freshness of the bride's perfume, the sweetness of the orange blossom, and all that airy, snow-white something in which she was drowned; and I looked into her red happy eyes, clumsily clasping the gold-cased ikon with which she had been blessed. And during the wedding ceremony I felt for the first time, but profoundly, the wonderful Old Testament strain in that glad sacrament, which is particularly beautiful in a country church, under its poor but solemnly lighted lustre, to the accompaniment of the harshly loud and exultant ejaculations of the rustic clergy, with the doors open to the green evening sky, a crowd of admiring shy country women and girls crowding through them. . . . And when this new and seemingly happy thing which entered our house with the young couple

was crowned by the unexpected arrival of my brother, and our whole family proved after all to be reunited and flourishing, the idea of returning to school struck me as quite absurd.

My brother, however, did much to dissuade me from leaving school. And in virtue of my increasing adoration of him, I gave in for a time—till Christmas. I returned to town in the autumn, and once more began attending classes, but I hardly looked at the lessons, and more and more often refused to answer the masters, who with polite, venomous calm would listen to my excuses of having a headache, and gleefully, in their fairest handwriting, write down a naught against my name. I would spend all my time reading Karamzin, Solovyov, Kostomarov, in wandering about the inns and markets, dressed in\* a *poddriovka* and high boots, listening avidly to the peasants' and townspeople's arguments and talks during bargaining or at tea-time, gadding about on the outskirts of the town, absorbing their aspect and life; I would meet and see off the trains at the station amid the hurly-burly and bustle of incoming and outgoing passengers, gluing my eyes to the infinite variety of their faces—especially the Moscow faces, the merchants' faces, and those from the Don and the Caucasus; envying those who hurriedly and excitedly took their seats, with lots of luggage, in the "long distance" coaches; delightedly sniffing the stuffy, redolent warmth of the crowded refreshment-room, invaded by occa-



sional gusts of fresh cold from the opening doors; gasping when the bells rang and an enormous long-liveried porter, coming to the middle of the waiting-room, sang out in a loud, solemn basso, announcing with a drawl, with stern and threatening sorrow, the departures and destinations of the trains. . . . Thus I lived till Christmas. As soon as I obtained leave, I ran home hot-foot, got ready in five minutes, hardly taking leave of the Rostovtsevs and Glebochka—he had still to wait for the coach from the country, while I was going by train, through Vasiliievskoe—snatched my little bag and jumping out into the street flung myself into the frozen, tattered sledge of the first cabman I came across. His shaggy nag tore off at full speed; the sledge whisked, bumping and clattering askew down the slopes, knocking off my memory in the hollows; the freezing wind tore at the uplifted collar of my uniform overcoat, spattering my face with keen snow; the town was drowned in a gloomy snowstorm dusk, and I panted with joy. On account of snow-drifts I sat two hours waiting at the station, till at last the train came in. . . . O! those snow-drifts, Russia, the night, the blizzard and the railway! What bliss!—that train whitened all over, blown up with snow-dust, that snug, warm cosiness of the carriage, the clatter of little hammers in the blazing stove, and outside the frost and the impenetrable snowstorm, then the bells, flames, and voices at some station hardly visible for snow just whirling

up from the ground and down from the roofs, and then again the desperate cry of the engine hurled somewhere into the darkness, into the stormy distance, into the unknown, and the first shock of the starting carriage, the vanishing light of the platform scintillating with diamonds passing across its frosted window-panes—and again night, desolation, snow-storm, the howling of the wind in the ventilator, while one is surrounded by quiet warmth, the half-light of the lamp behind its blue curtain, and the ever-increasing, swinging, lulling motion sending you to sleep in the springy velvet seat, and the pelisse dangling ever more amply on its peg before one's sleepy eyes!

Our station was about six miles from Vasilievskoe and it was already night when I arrived at the station, and outdoors raged such a storm that I had to spend the night in the cold station building, smelling of dim oil lamps, and the doors of which banged in the void of night with a peculiarly hollow sound, whenever the muffled, snow-covered conductors of goods trains, with red reeking lanterns in their hands, passed in or out. And yet this was lovely, too. I huddled up on the narrow sofa in the ladies' waiting-room, slept soundly, but woke up constantly with impatient expectancy of the morning, with the raging of the snowstorm and of some distant rough voices coming from somewhere beyond the bubbling, boiling noise of the engine, which stood, its fire-belching ash-pit open, under

the windows—and I woke up, starting up in the rosy light of the quiet frosty morning with a purely animal briskness. . . .

An hour later I was already in Vasilievskoe, sitting at breakfast in the warm cheerful house of our new relative Wiegand, not knowing where to look for happy confusion: coffee was being poured out by Annchen, his young niece from Reval. . . .

### XVIII

BEAUTIFUL—and especially that winter for me—was the manor of Baturino. The wide avenue covered with sugary snow, its drifts scored with sledge-runners, and blue shadows in their marks, leading to the neighbouring manor, the ancient stone pillars of the gateless drive to the courtyard, the snow-covered snug courtyard, silence, sun, in the pure frosty air the peaceful, sweet smell of wood-smoke from the kitchens, that pleasing homelike something in the footprints trodden from the kitchen to the house, from the servants' quarters to the dunghill, the stables and other outhouses surrounding the yard. . . . Silence and glitter, the whiteness of the snowladen roofs, the low wintry garden buried in deep snow, the bare branches showing reddish-black on both sides of the house, our particular hundred-year-old fir-tree lifting its pointed black-green top into the bright blue sky from behind the roof of the house, from behind its

steep declivity resembling a snowy mountain-top, between two chimneys and two quiet pink-yellow pennants of smoke. . . . On the sunwarmed fronts of the porches sit nunlike jackdaws, cuddled up pleasantly, usually chattering but now very quiet; and the ancient windows with the tiny squares of their frames look out in friendly fashion blinking because of the blinding bright light, and the icy glitter of precious stones on the snow. . . . Creaking with frosted felt-boots on the hard snow covering the steps, one mounts the main porch, the one on the right, passes under its shed, opens the heavy oak door black with age, passes through the long dark, gloomy vestibule. . . . In the footmen's room with its big rough chest by the window, it is still cool, bluish—the sun never comes here, its window looks north—but the stove makes a booming noise, its brass-door trembling. To the right is a dismal corridor leading to the living rooms, straight opposite—a high door, also of blackened oak, opening into the big hall. In the hall there is not always a fire—it is spacious and cold, and on its walls the portraits of the wooden, dark-faced grandfather in a curly peruke, and of the snubnosed Emperor Paul, in a uniform with red lapels, look chilly, eyeing each other from these walls in a rather unfriendly way, and other old portraits and chandeliers seem to be frozen right through, piled in a small long disused butler's pantry, to peep into which through its little door made half of glass

gave one when a child such mysterious delight. Yet in the hall everything is lapped in sunshine, and on the smooth and astonishingly wide floor-boards the reflections of the upper coloured window-panes flame and melt into dappling of purple and garnet. The windows are also high. Against the window on the left, at the side, also looking north, are the black branches of a huge lime-tree, and through the sunny ones facing the door one sees the garden heaped up with snow. The middle window, however, is entirely occupied by an extremely tall fir-tree, the one that shows even between the house chimneys: behind that window, in splendid rows, hang its snowy episcopal sleeves. . . . How unspeakably lovely it was on frosty moonlit nights! One would enter—there is no light in the hall, only the bright moon high up behind the windows. The hall is empty, magnificent, full as it were of the finest vapour, and the dense fir-tree, in its mourning snowy garments, rises regally behind the panes, its pointed top vanishing in the pure, translucent, unfathomable dome of blue where the wide-scattered constellation of Orion shows white and silvery, and lower down, in the luminous void of the firmament, the splendour of Sirius glitters sharply, trembling with azure diamonds—my mother's favourite star. . . . How often I wandered about in that moonlit vapour across the long shadowy window-gratings lying on the floor, how many youthful thoughts did I ponder, how often

I repeated Derzhavin's lordly-proud lines: *Amid the dark-blue ether there swam the golden moon, through windows shining on my house, and with its pallid ray painted golden window-panes upon my lacquered floor. . . .*

Lovely, too, were the new feelings which I knew during my first winter in that house. It all passed in walks and endless talks with my brother George, which helped to develop me extraordinarily quickly; in drives to Vasilievskoe; and in reading the poets of Derzhavin's and Pushkin's time. In the Baturino house there were hardly any books. But I began now driving to Vasilievskoe, to the manor of our cousin on my father's side, which crowned a hill opposite the Government estate, where Wiegand was the manager of a distillery. Our cousin was married to a squire called Pisarev, and for many years we had not been to her house—old Pisarev, her father-in-law, was, in contrast to his son, a man of extremely serious disposition, with whom my father naturally very soon quarrelled. In that year, the old man having died, relations between our houses were renewed, and I was given free access to the library which he had collected during his long life. God has spared me the passion for reading for its own sake, for reading anything whatever and fitfully. But that library proved to contain a multitude of marvellous little volumes in thick dark-golden leather bindings with golden stars on the back—Sumarokov, Anna Bunina, Derzhavin, Batyushkov, Zhukovsky, Venevitinov, Yazykov,

Kozlov, Baratynsky. . . . How admirable were their romantic vignettes—lyres, urns, helmets, wreaths,—their type, their rough, usually bluish paper, and, above all, the pure harmonious beauty, the nobility, the lofty style of every word printed on that paper! Pushkin was also there in the 1837 edition, quite different, it seems, from the modern editions. . . . And I cannot tell the joy with which I remember my Baturino years, especially that winter—chiefly because of the delights those little volumes gave me! In their company I lived through all my first youthful dreams, the first enthusiastic transports of my spirit, my first real thirst for writing, my first attempts to satisfy it—and, most of all, the voluptuousness of imagination. I now gave myself over to it, and to all the feelings it evoked, with especial vehemence, and it was truly miraculous. When I read: “Young poet’s flying into the battle”, or “Roar, roar, from your steep heights, hush not, O white-haired torrent” or “Amid the green waves kissing Taurida, at morning dawn I saw a Nereid”, I at once saw and felt that poet, and the torrent, and the green waves, and the sea morning, and the nude Nereid, so clearly that I longed to sing, to shout, to laugh, to weep. . . . I marvel at the childishness, the inanity of everything that came at the same time from my own pen!

Blissful, too, was my first taste of being in love, which lasted peacefully and joyously throughout

the winter. Annchen was a rather ordinary young girl, no more. But was it she who mattered? She was, besides, invariably gay, kindly, very good, she told me sincerely and simple-mindedly: "I like you very much Alioshenka, you have pure and ardent feelings!" Those feelings, of course, flared up instantly. I was inflamed at the first sight of her—as soon as she came out, in all the freshness of her German cleanness, her rather affected pink dress, her youthful prettiness, to meet me, chilled through with cold on the way from the station, in the Wiegand's dining-room, lit up rosily with the wintry morning sun, and began pouring out hot coffee for me. I had barely shaken her tiny fingers, still cold with water and smelling of almond-soap, when my heart gave a flutter and decided: "there it is!" And I left for Baturino fully assured—and not without reason—that I was in love. God only knows why I at once began trying to work up that amorousness, and even to impart to it something tantalising—all the same it came to nothing. Only the joy and impatience with which I constantly remembered that on the day after Christmas the Wiegands were coming on a visit to us were real. And here they came, at once filling the whole house with their noisy German gaiety, unprovoked laughter, and that peculiar holiday spirit which guests bring with them in the country, in winter, when, fresh from the frost, they throw off their fragrant cold pelisses, high goloshes and felt-boots.



Soon after that, I wrote triumphantly in my diary: "My foreboding has come true—I love and am loved!" I think, however, that without that foreboding, it would have been the same. In the evening other guests came too, and we all, except the grown-ups, decided, of course, to make a round of the neighbouring manors in fancy-dress. Noisily we disguised ourselves as best we could, mostly as peasants—my hair was curled tightly, my face rouged and powdered, a small black moustache painted with burnt-cork—and we thronged out on to the porch, before which, in darkness, there already stood some sledges; we took our seats laughing and shouting to the accompaniment of the bells, and swiftly whisked off, cutting through the fresh snow-heaps. And, of course, I turned out to be in the same sledge with Annchen. . . . How can I forget that nocturnal, wintry ringing of the bells, that desolate winter night in the deserted snowy fields, the extraordinary, wintry, grey, soft, mellowness with which, on such a night, the snow fuses with the low sky, while ahead one constantly fancies some uncanny little flames, the eyes as it were of some unknown creatures of the winter nights—how can I forget the snowy night air; the brisk chill penetrating under my raccoon pelisse and through my thin boots and light blue calico breeches; the small, warm, girlish hand disengaged from a fur-glove and for the first time in life held in one's young hot hands—so unexpectedly friendly, sub-

missive; and the girlish eyes already gleaming responsively, lovingly through the dusk! Never in all my life, and by nothing, was I struck so much as by our first awkward kiss on that grey, snowy winter night. . . .

## XIX

AND then came spring, the most extraordinary spring in all my life—not only because it was the first I knew in the country as a grown-up person. . . . And this is how it began.

I remember as if it were now—I was sitting in the nursery which looked into the courtyard. It was about five o'clock on a sunny March afternoon. The sun, already quite low, ready to vanish behind the opposite manor, wintry and yet springlike, promising unending days of joy ahead, flowed in a dazzling golden stream through the window, together with the golden, greenish glossiness of the snowy courtyard which had of late thawed a little. I had wandered haphazard into the nursery with a volume of Turgenev, and had sat down on the warm oven-step and lost myself in reading. Suddenly, buttoning up his fur-lined greatcoat, my father entered with his usual briskness—his moustache was now already grey, but he still looked fit as a fiddle—and said:

“A messenger from Vasilievskoe. Pisarev had a kind of a stroke—he was crossing the hall and

suddenly plumped down in a swoon. Going over there now—like to come with me?”

I rose, struck both by this news and by the unexpected lucky chance of going to Vasilievskoe and seeing Annchen, and we left at once. To our surprise we found Pisarev as if nothing were the matter, healthy and cheerful, himself wondering and not understanding what had happened to him. “Still, you ought to drink less,” my father said to him next day when taking leave of him in the parlour. “Rubbish!” replied Pisarev laughing with his grey gipsy eyes, helping my father with his greatcoat,—I see him as if it were now, well-built, dark-complexioned, black-bearded, in a red silk Russian shirt, in light black loose breeches and red, silver-embroidered Caucasian slippers. We returned home quietly, and soon the floods began, so swift and headlong that our communications with Vasilievskoe were completely cut for about a fortnight. On Easter Sunday it became quite dry, the willows and the commons began to turn green, the liberated fields and copses looked softly and pleasantly grey. We all, with the exception of Olya, and my mother, were proposing to go to Vasilievskoe and had already come out to take seats in the coach—when suddenly a horse appeared in the gateway, then a drozhky, and in it our cousin Peter Petrovich Arseniev.

“Christ is risen,” he greeted us, driving up to us, with an exaggerated calmness. “Going

to Vasilievskoe? In the nick of time. Pisarev's gone west. Wake this morning, went in to his wife, gave her the Easter kiss, then suddenly sat down in an armchair, dropped his head—dead and gone. . . .”

Pisarev had just been washed and laid out when we entered the house. He lay offering the usual sight of a dead man just laid on the table—the sight which as yet merely struck me by its oddity—in that very hall where a fortnight ago he was standing smiling on the threshold, screwing up his eyes against the light of the evening sun and of his cigarette. He lay with eyes closed—I still can see their dark purple bulge—but still quite like a living man, with hair and beard beautifully combed, still moist and jet-black, in a new frock-coat and starched shirt with well-knotted black silk tie, covered to his waist with a sheet, under which one could discern his stiff bound feet. I gazed at him calmly and blankly, even touched his forehead and hands—they were almost warm. . . . By the evening, however, everything had quite changed. I had shaken off my obtuseness, I realised what had happened, and when we were called to the first requiem entered the hall quite upset. The picture that met my eyes was indeed terrible. Behind the hall windows the dark spring sunset still hung crimson over the distant fields, but the dusk rising from the dark river valley and the dark, dank fields, from all the dark cooling earth, was flooding

it in ever thickening waves from below; in the dark hall, crowded with people, one could only see dimly for incense, and through that darkness and dimness in everybody's hands were the golden flames of small wax-candles, and from behind the tall church-candles which spread about the deathbed a red flame, there sounded ominously the ejaculations of the officiating priests, alternating oddly with the joyously and heedlessly persistent "Christ is risen from the dead trampling down Death by death. . . .", full of clear springlike sadness. And I would now stare ahead where, in the smoky glitter and twilight, the dead man's face, somehow grown woefully crestfallen, gleamed dully and already horribly darkened in the course of the day; now feel overcome with warm tenderness, aware of it being the only salutary refuge, and seeking out in the crowd the tiny face of Annchen, who stood quiet and discreet, warmly and innocently lit up from below by the candle's flame.

In the night I had a painful, restless sleep, besieged by recurring, unnaturally bright, disorderly visions of some bustling throng, uncannily and mysteriously connected with all that had happened: everybody walked about hurriedly—and, what was most horrible, was silently guided, it seemed, by the deceased himself—from room to room, hastily giving each other sundry advice, shifting tables, armchairs, beds, chests of drawers. . . . In the

morning I went out to the porch like a drunken man. The morning was quiet, warm and clear; the sun was warming up the dry porch, the courtyard with its bright, new, tender green, the garden, still bare of foliage, yet gleaming tenderly and already turning soft grey in a springlike way. But suddenly I looked round—and saw with horror close to me, standing upright against the wall, the long new, dark violet lid of the coffin. I ran down the steps of the porch, went to the garden, walked for a long time in its bare, luminous and warm alleys, sat down on a bench in one of the remote narrow walks bordered with low acacias. . . . It was growing warmer, the bullfinches were singing, the fluffy acacia was yellowing tenderly and gaily, the smell of the earth, of young grass filled one's soul with a sweet and poignant feeling; monotonously, gravely and triumphantly, without disturbing the meek silence of the garden the rooks shouted far off in the lowland, on the old birch-trees, where the young willows, bare as yet, looked like an olive-coloured smoke of spring. . . . And in everything there was death, death intermingled with eternal, lovely, and futile life. Somehow I suddenly recalled the opening pages of *Wilhelm Tell*—I had been reading Schiller: the mountains, the lake, a fisherman sailing and singing. . . . And in my soul suddenly rang out such a sweet, joyous, free song of remote happy lands, and I felt such pity for myself, for my spring, my youth, that I

jumped up and, quite beside myself, ran back to the house to join my father and brothers.

In a state, as it were, of ceaseless intoxication I passed that whole day, which kept me in continual tension: again there were requiems, again a throng, the coming and going of neighbours, endless ritual Easter kissing, grievous surprises, uncertain and yet greedy drinking and eating, and somewhere there, in the sunny nursery shut off on all sides, the care-free playing of the children, not yet understanding things, nor wishing to understand, under the grieving and kindly inattentive supervision of the nurse, who now and again wept quietly to herself. . . .

And again dusk began to creep down, and again people began slowly gathering, waiting with feigned sad submissiveness for a fresh service, thronging the hall, exchanging circumspect remarks. . . . The arrival of the priests, and the ensuing silence, the lighting of the candles and the donning of vestments in that silence, all those mysteriously ecclesiastical preparations for the service, and then the first swing of the censer and the first exclamation—all this struck me now, on the dead man's last evening, as so full of significance and solemnity that the ground swam away from under my feet, and I could no longer raise my eyes towards what was in front, that pompous velvet coffin elevated upon tables put together, and towards that mystical and terrible, picturesquely funereal thing which

rose aslant in the coffin in all the sinister splendour of its golden covering, the small gold ikon on the breast, and a new starchy-white pillow; in the gloomy darkness of the everlasting sepulchral sleep of the blackbearded face with its hollow, blackened eyelids, showing metallically lustrous through the warm, sultry smoke and the hot, trembling glitter. . . .

For this night also beds were put up for myself and my brother George in *his* former study. The doors into the deserted hall, still full of incense, where a sexton was reading psalms in a low monotonous voice by the light of snuffed candles, were closed on all sides, the house at last hushed and calmed. My brother, after a short talk with me, blew out the candle and soon fell asleep. But I could not even undress for anguish and fear, and lay down in my clothes; and barely had I also extinguished the candle and dozed off for a moment when I saw myself in the hall—and came to my senses in mad horror. I sat up and with thumping heart, began peering into the darkness, taking in the slightest rustle of sound. Everything was extraordinarily, dreadfully quiet—one could hear only the remote indistinct psalmodizing in the hall—but every instant I expected a floor-board to creak, a door to open noiselessly—and to see *him* in the darkness, rising to his full height, with eyes shut, and clothed in all his sepulchral array. And at the same time my soul was torn asunder by an



unspeakable anguish, an unutterable despair. . . . I made the last effort, flung my legs off the sofa, threw open the door of the study, ran across the dark corridor and pressed my ear to the door from under which came the light from the hall: "*The Lord reigneth; He is apparelled with majesty; the Lord is apparelled. He has girded Himself with strength . . .*"—the sexton was saying in a low, wooden and hurried voice behind the door.—"*The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. . . . Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. . . . They shall perish but Thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them. . . . Let the glory of the Lord endure for ever; let the Lord rejoice in His works. . . .*"

Seized by a spasm of rapturous sobbing, I walked quickly and clumsily away along the dark corridor, and through the dark back parlour and vestibule I made my way to the back porch. Running down its steps, I walked round the house and stopped in the middle of the courtyard. It was dark and somehow peculiarly pure, fresh, and quiet. The ground was slightly frozen and stiff. Some very fine and pure vapour was just perceptible, silvery between the earth and the clear starlit sky. In the silence, from far off, came the even, muffled noise of the thawed river in the valley. I looked into the darkness beyond the valley, at the opposite

hill—there, in Wiegand's house, a lonely belated light burned red.

"It is she not sleeping," thought I. "*The floods have lifted up their voices ; the floods lift up their waves,*" I thought—and the light suddenly trembled, ray-like, in my eyes with fresh tears—tears of happiness, of love, of hope, and of an almost hysterical, exultant tenderness.

## **BOOK THREE**



## I

THAT terrible spring night in Vasilievskoe is the more memorable to me as it was on the eve of the funeral.

I fell asleep only when morning was drawing close. I was unable to return to the house at once—its outlines and the black coffin-lid at the porch showed too ominously dark in the star-light, it was all too wildly in contradiction with what filled my heart to overflowing. I went into the fields; for a long time I walked in darkness blindly, going nearly as far as Znamenie. . . . I came back when the East was already whitening and all over the village the cocks crowed; I slunk into the house by the same back door, and fell asleep at once. Soon, however, through my sleep, the thought of some impending and particularly important moments began to torment me, and suddenly I started up again, having slept hardly three hours. The house was still divided into two quite distinct worlds; in one there was death, the hall with the coffin; in the other, that is in all the remaining rooms, shut off from it on all sides by closed doors, our disorderly life was going on helter-skelter, impatiently awaiting the fatal climax of

that disorder. I woke up with the acute sense of that climax having at last arrived, and was not a little surprised to see my brother, who shared the dead man's study with me, indifferently smoking a cigarette, sitting in his underclothes on the sofa from which a crumpled sheet trailed down to the floor, while in the corridor behind the door people were already walking hurriedly; one heard voices, curt questions and answers.. In came Maria Petrovna, the head-maid, bringing tea on a tray, bowed silently without looking at us, and after placing the tray on the desk, went out preoccupied. With trembling hands I began to dress. In the study, papered with oldish golden wall-paper, everything was simple, workaday and even cheerful; about it, telling of our masculine morning life, swam fragrant cigarette smoke. My brother was smoking and gazing absentmindedly at those same Caucasian slippers of Pisarev's in which I had seen him, in all his brisk gipsy handsomeness, a fortnight ago, and which now sat peacefully under his eyes. I too cast a glance at them, and everything became still more muddled in my head: yes, I thought, he is no longer there, yet here his slippers are still sitting, and they can sit on for another hundred years! And where is he now, and where will be to the end of time? And is it really true that somewhere there, in some other world he has already met with all our long-departed, mythical grandmothers and grandfathers? And what is he now—

a spirit, or merely my idea of him? Is it really he—that terrible something which lies in the hall on the joined tables, between those tilting edges of the coffin, unnaturally lit up in broad daylight by the dull flames of the candles, reduced to short stumps which have thickly spotted and smeared the notched paper surrounding them on the tall silver candlesticks—he who but two days ago, on just such a morning as this was entering, with newly-combed black beard still fresh after washing, his wife's room next door, on the floor of which, half-an-hour later, they were already washing his naked body, as yet almost alive, limply and helplessly flopping? And yet it is he, I reflected, and it is to-day, that for him will befall that last, terrible, mystical thing which he seemed to have nothing to do with when alive, that most marvellous thing in the world in which for the first time in my young life I am going to take part—to live through the realization of those same remarkable words which at school, for some reason, I was supposed to learn by heart: "Three days after a Christian's death his body must be borne out to church. . . . As preparation for this serve, in the presence of the family, friends and relatives of the deceased, intensive thurifications round his body and singing of chants about his laying to rest till the Last Judgment and the rising of all the dead. . . ." With a great surprise I suddenly realized that at the moment Pisarev was that very Christian and

I felt horrified when I thought of the endless time which he, and all of us, had still to wait for that rising whereupon there is supposed to begin, and to last through eternity, something already quite unimaginable, devoid both of sense and of purpose, and having no end. . . .

## II

I WATCHED avidly and with heart a-flutter the bearing out of the body. The farmhands, looking festively sated and clean, were strong and young, yet it was with some awkward and fearsome tension, their heads averted, that they pushed their heavy load off the tables and raised it up on white lengths of cloth, when finally came the last moment of Pisarev's parting with his home and with the whole world. To me then it seemed again that in that huge velvety violet box, with its ghastly silvery paws, there lay something sacred, but at the same time obscenely earthly and foul. That something, with obediently crossed and petrified hands sticking out of the black frock-coat sleeves, woodenly swinging its dead head, floated low and obliquely, at the others' will, over the floor, amid the throng, the festive vestments, the incense and discordant singing, its feet towards the wide-open door—let them never again cross the threshold of that house!—first into the parlour, then to the porch, into the bright light and greenness of the spring court-



yard, where, over the crowd, rose the Crucifix, and two peasants were holding over their heads the lid of the coffin. Here the farmhands paused, straining their flushed necks with the lengths of cloth, and the singing became louder—"in token of the deceased passing over into the realm of disembodied spirits surrounding the throne of the Almighty and singing ceaselessly His threefold praise"—and from the top of the belfry, looking from behind the outhouses right opposite the porch, which had hitherto been slowly dropping thick, pitiful sounds that grew ever thicker and thicker, there came sharp a brief, intentionally absurd, tragic discord of the bass and alto to which, in a simultaneous and discordant barking and howling, the frightened dogs filling the courtyard replied. So hideous was it that my cousin, in a long mourning dress, staggered and burst into sobs, the peasant women in the crowd started to cry, and my father, who was also clumsily upholding the coffin, was distorted with disgust and pain. . . .

In the church I looked all the time at the cadaverous face of the deceased, who lay just in front of the Holy Gate, under the rotund closed cupola painted all over with stony blue-grey clouds amid which, from a rough blue triangle, oblong, hard, and enigmatic, stared out the All-seeing Eye. The burial service was already proceeding and that face, with its sharpened nose, its black trans-

parent beard and moustache, under which gleamed the flat clotted lips, was already sepulchrally crowned with the particoloured paper-band. I gazed thinking the while: 'he now resembles an old-time grand prince; now he is for ever ranked among the saints, among the host of all our forefathers and forbears. . . .' Already they were singing over him: "Blessed are those that are undefiled in the way, and walk in the law of the Lord," whilst I, full of torment and pain for him and of fond feelings for myself, thought more or less thus: 'Presently between his rigid fingers with blackened nails they will place the "absolution", anoint him with "holy chrism", besprinkle him crosswise with the "earth", cover up with gauze and put on the lid; they will take him out and bury him, and go away and forget, and years will pass, and my long and happy life will last somewhere there, in my misty and luminous future, and he, or rather his skull and bones, will still go on lying buried in the earth behind this church, amid the tall grass, under the little birch tree which will be planted to-day at the head of his grave and will one day grow into a big, fine, white-trunked tree with its low grey-green crown rippling and sweetly quivering on a long summer day. . . .' Giving him "the last kiss", I touched the paper wreath with my lips—and, Lord! what cold and stench blew up at me in that terrible moment, and how upset I was by the icy hardness of the dark-lemon frontal bone

under that wreath, in inconceivable differentiation from all that living, spring-like warmth, which was being wafted in so sweetly and simply through the grated windows of the church!

Afterwards, standing behind the church among the old tomb-stones and monuments of various brigadiers and majors, I stared into the deep narrow pit, its hard and evenly cut flanks shining dully and desolately: rude and pitiless the grey primeval earth flew there, hastily poured down upon the violet velvet, upon the white braided cross. I wanted to exacerbate myself profanely, I recalled the cold All-seeing Eye in the stone-cloudy sky of the church cupola, thought of the unutterable something which would be in that coffin in a week's time, even tried to persuade myself that after all, on a certain appointed day the same thing would happen to me. . . . But of faith in it there was none; the grave was already made flush with the ground; Annchen was wearing a new cambric dress; kindly and magnanimously, solving all things and encouraging all things, the last chant rang out, once more festive, once more Christ's, vanishing into the warm sunny air. . . . The world seemed to have grown still younger, freer, vaster and lovelier after someone had departed from it for ever. . . .

## III

ON our way home from the churchyard our cousin walked stumblingly, pressing her handkerchief close to her eyes, heedless of anything in front of her. But my father held her firmly under the elbow, and, trying to keep pace with her, was persistently telling her all the empty, nice things which one always says on such occasions:

"It's no use, dear, to comfort you, but one thing I will say: remember that despair is a mortal sin, that you're not alone in the world, that you've got people who love you infinitely, that you've got children who give you a noble aim in life, and, most important of all you are still so young, you have everything ahead of you."

I suddenly realized, with poignant emotion, that she was really only twenty-five, that she was good-looking, and now, in mourning, having grown dreadfully thin and pale during the last few days, she looked still more beautiful and younger, and had once more become like a young girl. . . .

Next to my father walked an old friend of his, a nobleman's peaked cap in his hand, a round and thick-set landowner, very sunburnt and of naturally dusky complexion into the bargain, who had some golden-brown spots on the yellowish whites of his brown eyes which had intrigued me ever since my childhood. He was hot because of his unaccustomed frock-coat and starched shirt,

because of his sturdy stoutness and the emotions which stirred him. And he, too, wheezing with haste and asthma, was saying the same things as my father:

"Vera Petrovna, allow me to say this too: I stood the deceased in good stead after his father's death, it was I who baptized him, and brought him up, and gave him away when he married you—you realize my feelings. . . . Then, you know: I, too, became a widower early. . . . Yet Alexander is altogether right. You know what the peasants say? 'Death is like sun, one may not look at it. . . .' No, one mayn't and one mustn't either, otherwise one can't live. . . . I am ashamed you see that he is no longer here whilst I still walk and wheeze, but does it depend on us?"

I looked at his large cropped silver-grey head, with his broad nape, at the old worn wedding-ring on his small dark hand—the memory of his having once loved too, having been young and happy. . . . I looked and realized that we all felt more or less ashamed, uneasy, and yet it was so infinitely sweet to return to life after that terrible burden which had been weighing us down for three days on end, and I caught myself thinking how fine it was to tread the soft spring earth; to listen to the ceaseless, discordant cawing of the rooks, wrangling and bustling about with impetuous and agonizing ecstasy in all the neighbouring gardens; to behold my cousin with new, almost amorous eyes, her

mourning, the beauty of her youth and sorrow; to think with a sinking of the heart that I had on that day an appointment with Annchen at the bottom of the garden. . . .

The house, too, seemed to have grown younger, having freed itself of its master. All its floors and window-panes were washed, everything was tidied up, and the windows were thrown wide open to the sun and air. Over the threshold of the hall, where tables were placed and laid out for the funeral banquet, I was at once met by that dreadful smell unlike anything in the world which had been irritating me throughout the morning near the coffin. But that smell was in some peculiar stimulating way mixed up with the dampness of the floors, still dark with water, and with the spring freshness which was wafted up from everywhere into the house; and festively, destined for a feast of life, not of death, the tables gleamed with the tablecloths, knives and forks, glasses and decanters. . . . Yet how horrible that protracted and coarsely plentiful dinner was, interrupted every now and then by the already inharmonious, drunken voices of the choirmen, who rose up and with feeling sang the eternal memory of the incomprehensible being whom they had just buried behind the church. My father was right when he said to me during dinner:

"I know, I know, dear, how you feel now! We are already proof against it, but you, on the thres-

hold of life and with such an unmodern heart as yours into the bargain. . . . I can imagine your feelings!"

## IV

AFTER the funeral I stayed in Vasilievskoe for a fortnight or so—still full of the intense and ambiguous sensation of that selfsame life whose incredible and dreadful end I had just contemplated with my own eyes.

It was the more agonizing for me in those days as I had to pass through another ordeal—the parting with Annchen, who was going home (though in that, too, I found some poignantly bitter delight, an impetus to some hopelessly-happy, springlike daring).

My father and Pyotr Petrovich decided, for my cousin's sake, to remain for a time in Vasilievskoe. I also stayed behind with them—and not only for the sake of Annchen, for whom my passion increased every day: I wanted somehow to prolong the strange emotions which possessed me and made me keep *Faust*, which happened then, as if on purpose, to fall into my hands and fascinated me completely:

New up, now down I speed,  
In life-flow, stormy deed,  
Rush hither or recede!  
A birth, a grave,  
The tireless wave,

A change o'er rife,  
A glowing life,  
I make time's shuttle forward press,  
And weave the Godhead's living dress.<sup>1</sup>

Ambiguous, too, was the life in Vasilievskoe. It was still veiled by great sadness, but somehow amazingly rapidly brought back to order, acquiring something especially agreeable because of the changes that took and were taking place in it amid the blossoming and strengthening springtime beauty. Everybody felt it was high time to return to life with new and even redoubled forces. Every day floors continued to be washed, and windows in the hall were left open in order to drive away the last vestiges of the smell of death. Especial cleanliness was maintained in the rest of the house, where a good deal had been changed—some of the out-of-date furniture removed to the garret, some thing shifted from one room to another, a new bedroom arranged for my cousin next to the nursery, while their former bedroom, behind the little drawing-room, was completely rearranged and turned into a spacious sitting-room. Then nearly all the dead man's things were hidden somewhere—one day I saw his nobleman's gala uniform, his cap with red band, his plumed three-cornered hat being brushed on the back porch, and put away into an old coffer.

<sup>1</sup> Trans. by C. Fillingham Coxwell. Goethe's *Faust*, London, Daniel, 1932.



. . . The sun was warm, green was the thickening grass before the porch, a young maid was talking animatedly to Maria Petrovna as she bent over the box, and little Mitya stood by their side, that three-cornered hat pulled deeply over his eyes, trying to draw a fine sword from its sheath. . . . New ways were introduced also into the management of the estate: it was now in the hands of my father and Pyotr Petrovich and every one of the servants, as is usual between masters and workmen at the outset, was zealously obedient, wanted to hope that because of this new regime everything would now somehow go in a different way, properly. I was, I remember, greatly touched by it. Most touching, however, was the gradual return to life of my cousin, the way in which she was little by little coming to her senses, growing ever calmer and simpler, and already at times faintly smiling at table to the silly and charming questions of her children, while Pyotr Petrovich and my father were discreetly, but invariably, affectionate and attentive to her. . . .

And with astonishing swiftness those bitter-sweet days flitted by for me. After parting from Annchen late at night, sweetly tormented by the endless leave-taking with her, I would come home and go straight to the study and fall dead asleep thinking of to-morrow's meeting. In the morning I hurriedly drank tea and sat impatiently, book in hand, in the sunlit garden, awaiting the moment when it would

again be possible to run across the river to take Annchen for a walk. During those hours there always walked with us the girls, Wiegand's younger daughters; but they usually ran ahead, and did not disturb us. . . . At noon I came back for dinner, after dinner re-read *Faust*, read—heaven knows why—Macaulay's *History of England*, old issues of *The European Messenger*—and waited for the evening meeting. . . . At night, in the remote part of the garden, the young moon would shine, mysteriously and cautiously the nightingales would sing. Forgetting her former bashfulness Annchen would sit on my knees, and embrace me, and I would hear the beating of her heart, for the first time in my life feel the blissful weight of a woman's body. . . .

At last she left. Never had I wept so fiercely and abundantly as on that day. But with what tenderness, with what poignancy of the sweetest love for the world, for life, for bodily and moral human beauty, which, all unwittingly, Annchen had unveiled for me, did I weep! And at night when, already dulled by tears and hushed, I was again, goodness knows why, wandering to the other side of the river, the coach in which Annchen had been driven to the station overtook me, and the coachman, halting, handed me a copy of a Petersburg illustrated magazine to which, a month or so before, I had for the first time sent a poem. I unfolded it as I walked—and as if by lightning my eyes were

struck and blinded by the magic letters of my own name. . . .

The next day, early in the morning, I walked to Baturino. I walked at first along the dry, already rutted cart-track, amid the ploughed fields, gleaming in the morning mist, where with a swinging motion strode the sowing peasants with bags hanging from their shoulders, and bareheaded; then along a dewy boundary-line towards the Pisarev's wood; then through the wood, sunny, light-green, full of spring life and of birds' singing, of the last year's rotting leaves and of the first lilies-of-the-valley. . . . When I came to Baturino, my mother even threw her hands up at the sight of my freshly grown moustache, my thinness, and the expression of my sharply cut eyes. And, after kissing her, I silently handed her the magazine and went to my room to wash and change, staggering with fatigue and not recognizing the familiar house, wondering at its having become so tiny and old. . . .

## V

THAT spring I was in my sixteenth year. I still had in me a good deal of childishness, naivety, ardour, and simple-heartedness. People already said that I had "too high an opinion of myself", that I was brusque and even haughty in my judgments, in my attitude to people. . . . And this was all true to a certain extent. But then, that too was only

evidence of my childishness. Yet, on coming back to Baturino from Vasilievskoe, I was already quite confirmed in the belief that my entry into full-fledged adult life had been accomplished.

During the winter it had already seemed to me that I knew a great deal about what every grown-up man was supposed to know: I knew about the way the universe was organized and about something called the ice-age, and about the savages of the stone age, and about the life of the ancients, and the barbaric invasions of Rome, about Kievan Russia, and about the discovery of America, and the French Revolution, and Byronism, and Romanticism, and the men of the 'forties, and Zhelyabov and Pobedonostsev, not to speak of a number of fictitious persons and lives which had insinuated themselves into me forever, with all their feelings and destinies, that is all those Hamlets, Don-Carloses, Childe Harolds, Onegins, Pechorins, Rudins, Bazarovs, would be necessary to everybody. . . . And now my life experience seemed to me enormous. I came home dead-tired but firmly resolved to begin living henceforth some already quite "full" life. What should that life comprise? I believed that it should consist of experiencing, among all its impressions and one's favourite pastimes, as many as possible of certain lofty poetical delights to which I even held myself to be somehow especially entitled. "We enter'd life with hopes so fine.

. . .” With fine hopes, too, I was setting out now. Still, in winter, when I had been reading so much, constantly turning upon myself what I read, I had once copied into my notebook, adding to the number of my favourite quotations from books, the following lines: “At times I have moments either of anticipation or of a kind of recollection of some unending happiness. . . .” It was not for nothing that I had copied that sentence, I already understood such moments. Now I could understand them still better, and my days flowed on in constant expectation of the fulfilment of those anticipations and recollections. Though what reason had I to expect it?

There was a sense of everything still lying ahead of me, a sense of my youthful forces, of bodily and mental health, of a certain handsomeness of face and of great advantages of build, of ease and sureness of movement, of a light and swift gait, of courage and address—how I rode, for instance! There was the consciousness of my abilities, my youthful purity, my noble impulses, truthfulness, contempt for every meanness. There was an exalted state of mind, both inborn and acquired through reading poets who spoke invariably of a poet’s lofty mission, of poetry being “God in the holy dreams of the earth,” of art being “a step towards the better world”. There was some soul-exulting delight even in that bitter passion with which, at moments, I also repeated something quite different

—such as the caustic lines of Lermontov and Heine, the complaints of Faust, turning towards the moon behind his Gothic window, his dying, disenchanted look, or the jovial shameless sentences of Mephistopheles. . . . But then, did I not realize at times that all this did not suffice, that it was not enough to have wings in order to fly, that one's wings needed training and air?

I could not help experiencing those quite peculiar feelings which are experienced by all very young writers who have already seen their name in print. But neither could I help knowing that one swallow does not make a summer, that "there are laurels on Pindus, but nettles, too". My father, in his moments of anger, called me a raw sprig of nobility; I found comfort in the thought that I was not the only one to have studied "by and by, at random"; yet I fully realized how dubious was that comfort, and at times I thought:

"Wouldn't it really be better for me to go, as my brother Nicholas advises me, to a military school, in order to have at least some definite place in life and an assured livelihood?"

Secretly (notwithstanding my being already infected, thanks to reading and to my brother George, with a multitude of independent opinions) I was still very proud of the fact that we were Arsenievs. But I could not help at the same time remembering all our impoverishment, our growing indigence, and the fact that our disregard of this was positively

abnormal in us. I grew up in the strange conviction, which remained with me, that, barring all the merits of my brothers, George's especially, I was nevertheless the main heir to all these remarkable qualities which, granted all his shortcomings, made my father stand out so prominently in my eyes among all the people I knew. But my father was no longer the same as he used to be; he seemed to have thrown up the game, to be nearly always tipsy, and to confine practically all his proprietary cares to the leasing-out of land and the sale of the remaining cows, horses, carts, even harness. What had I to feel then at the constant sight of his permanently flushed face, his grey, stubbly chin, his grandly tousled head, his worn-out slippers and tattered dressing-gown, dating from the days of Sevastopol? And what pain it caused me at times to think of my ageing mother, of Olya growing up! I also felt often a strong pity for myself, after having dined, for instance, on nothing but iced rye-beer soup and returning to my room, to my books and to my sole riches—my grandfather's casket of lacquered birch-tree-wood where I kept all my most private possessions—those sheets of grey paper smelling of mint-tobacco, bought in our village shop with my last pennies, and covered with "elegies" and "stanzas". . . .

I thought at times about my father's youth: what an enormous difference to mine! He had virtually had everything proper to a happy youth of his

class, his standing and his requirements; he grew up and lived in carelessness which was all but natural seeing the still great lordliness which he so freely and quietly enjoyed; he knew no fetters to his youthful whims and desires; everywhere, with full right and cheerful haughtiness, he felt himself to be an Arseniev. And I had only a birchwood casket, an old gun, my lean Kabardinka, a worn Cossak saddle. . . . How I longed at times to be elegant and brilliant! Yet, on going to a party, I had to put on that self-same grey suit of my brother George in which he had been one day taken to the Kharkov prison and which secretly caused me to be tormented with acute shame. at the party. I was devoid of the sense of property, but how I dreamed sometimes of wealth, of fine luxury, of freedom of every sort, and of all the physical and moral joys connected with them! I dreamed of long travels, of viewing the whole world, of extraordinary feminine beauty, of friendship with some fictitious, wonderful, young men, my contemporaries and fellow-dreamers, sharing my ardour and my tastes. . . . And was I not, at times, aware that I had never as yet set my foot beyond the district town and some neighbouring villages, that the whole world was as yet shut off for me by the long-familiar fields and hillocks, that I saw only peasants and their womenfolk, that the circle of our acquaintance was confined to a couple of small manors together with Vasilievskoe, and the refuge of all my dreams—to



my old corner-room with its dilapidated window-frames and the coloured upper panes of the two windows facing the garden?

## VI

BE that as it may, I was home again; and once more everything around me was peaceful, simple and lovely.

Days passed, and I was gradually coming to my senses. The garden had lost its blossom and put on its summer garb; all day long a nightingale sang there; all day long the lower frames of my windows were up, and I grew to be still fonder of my room because of the oldness of those windows, consisting of minute squares, of the dark oak ceiling, oak armchairs, and the oak bed with its smooth and sloping flanks. . . . At first I did nothing but lie with a book, now reading absentmindedly, now listening to the nightingale's warbling, thinking of that "full" life which I, now that I was quite free, had to live henceforth, and at times suddenly falling into a short and profound sleep, on recovering from which I invariably wondered afresh at the newness and loveliness of the things surrounding me, and felt so hungry that I would jump up and go and fetch either some jam in the pantry, that is in the forlorn little closet whose glass door led to the big hall, or some black bread in the servants' cottage, which by daytime was always deserted

—there, in the dark corner on the hot and dusty stove, lay Leonty, a long and incredibly lean old man, covered with thick yellow stubble and actually peeling with age, grandmother's former cook, who for many years now, goodness knows why, had been defending his incomprehensible cave-dweller's existence against infallible death. . . . Hopes for happiness, for a happy life about to begin! Yet often all that one needed for it was to recover like this from a sudden and short nap, and to run and fetch a crust of black bread, or to be called to tea on the verandah, and at the tea-table to think that presently one would go and saddle a horse and ride at random along the darkening highway towards the town, harping upon a couple of lines of Lermontov that happened to dwell in one's mind:

Blue with distance the far steppe  
Verging on the Azov shores. . . .

The nights were moonlit, and sometimes I would wake up in the dead of night, in its most desolate hour when even the nightingale was silent. The whole world was so quiet that I would seem to wake up because of the very excess of stillness. For a moment I would be seized with fear—suddenly I would remember Pisarev, fancy his tall shadow in the corner beside the drawing-room door. . . . But instantly that shadow vanished, I

saw only a corner darkening through the thin twilight of the room, and behind the open windows gleamed the moonlit garden calling one into its luminous, speechless realm. And I would rise, put on any clothes, cautiously open the drawing-room door. In the twilight I saw grandmother's portrait in a frilled bonnet looking at me from the wall; I peered into the hall where I had spent so many lovely hours on moonlit winter nights. . . . It seemed more mysterious now, and lower, because the moon which was now walking to the right of the house did not look into it and it had itself become gloomier: the lime-tree behind its north windows, thickly covered with foliage, quite blocked up those windows with its huge dark canopy. . . . Going out to the verandah, I always wondered afresh, to the point of sheer bewilderment, even of some pain, at the beauty of the night: what is it after all, and what must one do with it! Even now I still feel something of the kind on moonlit nights. What must it have been then, when it was all new, when one's sense of smell was such that one could pick out the scent of a dewy burdock from the odour of damp grass! The exceedingly tall narrow triangle of the fir-tree, moonlit on one side only, still raised its notched pointed top to the translucent night sky, where a few sparse stars were glimmering, minute, peaceful, and so infinitely remote and wonderful, truly God's, that one felt an impulse to kneel and cross oneself before them.

The empty lawn before the house was flooded with a strange and powerful light. To the right, over the garden, a full moon shone in a clear and vacant sky with the hardly darkened reliefs of its deadly-pale face filled from within with bright luminous whiteness. And both of us, now long-familiar to each other, looked long at each other, patiently and silently expecting something from each other. What? I only knew that we both missed something very much. . . .

Then I would walk, with my shadow beside me, along the dewy, iridescent grass of the lawn, enter the dappled twilight of the alley leading to the pond; and the moon followed me docilely. I walked now and then turning round—it rolled shining and breaking mirror-like, through the black and sometimes brightly brilliant pattern of the boughs and leaves. I stood on the dewy slope descending towards the brimming pond shining with its vast golden surface beside the dam on the right. I gazed—and the moon gazed. By the shore, below me, there was the vacillating abyss, like a dark mirror, of the subaqueous sky, on which the ducks hang, sleeping their light sleep, hiding their heads under their wings, and deeply reflected in it; beyond the pond, to the left, there darkly loomed Uvarov's manor, that same squire whose illegitimate son was Glebochka; on the other side of the pond lay the clayey hillocks lit directly by the moon, and farther—a large nocturnally bright

village pasture and a row of black cottages beyond. What wondrous silence! And how that gleam by the dam seemed to grow brighter and brighter! The wildly anxious screaming of the suddenly awakened ducks, who stirred underneath them their vacillating mirror-like sky, echoed as thunder might through the neighbouring gardens. . . . And when I walked slowly further on, along the pond to the right, the moon again rolled quietly alongside with me over the dark tops of the trees, frozen in their nocturnal beauty. . . .

So we would make the tour of the whole garden. It was just as if we were also thinking together—and always about the same thing: about the puzzling, tormentingly amorous happiness of life, about my enigmatic future, which could not be but happy—and, of course, all the time about Annchen. The figure of Pisarev, living as well as dead, passed more and more into oblivion. What was left of my grandmother, beyond her portrait on the drawing-room wall? It was the same with Pisarev: thinking of him, I now usually saw mentally only his large photograph hanging in the sitting-room of the Vasilievskoe house, a photograph dating from just after he had married (and probably expected to live for ever!) There also came to my mind the old thought: Where was that man now, what happened to him, what was the eternal life in which he was supposed to dwell? But unanswered questions no longer caused me anxious bewilderment;

there was even some solace in them: where he was—God alone knew, Whom I do not understand, but in Whom I must and do believe in order to live and be happy. Already legend was taking hold of that man who invariably looked down so youthfully, vividly, mockingly, defiantly—from the wall in that very house where once he had been born and grown up, where he lived as youth, as husband, as master, and where now his children were growing up. . . . Annchen tormented me for a longer time. Even in the daytime—whatever I looked at, whatever I felt, read or thought, she was behind it all, my affection for her, the recollections linked up with her, the pain of there being no longer anyone to whom I could tell how I loved her and how many beautiful things there were in the world which we could have enjoyed together; of the night there is no need to speak—here she possessed me entirely. But time went on—and now Annchen, too, gradually began to be turned into a legend, to lose her living shape; somehow I no longer believed that she had ever been with me, and that she still lived somewhere in the present; already I began to think of her and feel her only poetically with a yearning after love in general, after some universal, lovely, womanly image, confused with images from the poems of Pushkin, Lermontov, Byron. . . .

And so May went by, the spring was over, and the summer set in. Could I have thought when

parting with Annchen that in a few weeks I was to become unfaithful to her? Yet that is what happened.

## VII

ONCE at the beginning of summer I read in *The Week* to which, extremely proud of the fact, I had subscribed that year, about the publication of the collected poems of Nadson. What enthusiasm his name then aroused, in even the remotest parts of the country! I had already read some Nadson, and, try as I might, could not make myself respond. "Let the poison of pitiless doubts expire in the tormented breast," seemed to me mere rhetoric in bad taste. I could not feel special respect for poems in which marsh-sedge was said to grow on the shores of a mere, and even to bend its "green boughs" over it. But never mind—Nadson was a poet who died untimely, a young man with a beautiful and sad look in his eyes, of whom people wrote that he "expired amid roses and cypresses on the shores of the azure Southern sea". . . . When, during the winter, I read of his death and his metal coffin, "all drowned in flowers", being sent for solemn funeral to "frosty and foggy St. Petersburg", I came down to dinner so pale and excited that even my father looked anxiously at me and was reassured only when I explained the reason of my grief.

"Ah, is that all?" he asked with surprise hearing that the reason was Nadson's death.

And added angrily, with relief:

"What nonsense comes into your head! And I was already sure something terrible had happened. . . ."

Now the item of news in *The Week* roused me enormously. In the course of the winter Nadson's fame had increased, the publication of the first edition of his collected poems was talked of as an event of all-Russian importance. The thought of that fame suddenly made me feel so giddy, called forth such longing for my own fame, after which I had to set out at once, without losing a single moment, that I decided to go the very next day to town to get Nadson's works in order to learn, properly this time, what he was like, what it was, besides his poetical death, which roused all Russia's admiration. There was no horse to ride: Kabardinka had gone lame, the working horses were too lean and ugly,—one had perforce to walk. And so I did, though the town was fully twenty miles away. I started early, striding along the hot and deserted highway without resting, and about three o'clock was already entering the library in the Commercial Street. The young woman with curls on her forehead, who sat lonely and obviously very bored in the stuffy, poky room filled from top to bottom with books in battered bindings, looked at me, exhausted as I was by my walk and by the sun, rather with curiosity.



"There is a queue for Nadson," she said carelessly. "You won't get it for a month. . . ."

I was flabbergasted at first, disconcerted—to have walked twenty miles for nothing was no trifle!—but it turned out that she had merely wanted to tease me:

"Then you're a poet too?" she added at once with a grin. "I know you, I've seen you when you were still a schoolboy. . . . I'll give you my own copy. . . ."

I launched into thanks and, blushing with confusion and pride, dashed out into the street with my precious book so joyously that I nearly knocked down a slim girl of about fifteen, in a grey gingham dress, who had just stepped out of a carriage standing by the pavement. The carriage was drawn by three horses—all piebald, all sturdy and small, all of exactly the same colour, like birds of a feather. Still more odd was the coachman, who sat bent on the box: he was a red-haired Caucasian, extremely withered and lean, and extremely ragged, but a great swell, who wore a brown Caucasian fur-cap cocked sideways and back. Inside the carriage sat a stout and majestic lady in a loose coat of Japanese silk. She looked at me rather severely and with surprise, while the girl jumped aside with real fear which flashed marvellously in her dark consumptive eyes, and in the whole of her fine, pure face, with its slightly mauve hue and touchingly unhealthy lips. I felt still more embarrassed,

shouted with undue fervour and refinement, "Oh, *do* forgive me—for God's sake!" and without turning ran down the street towards the market, with the sole thought of perusing the book as soon as possible and having tea at Zhokhov's establishment. Yet that meeting was not to end so simply.

Decidedly I was in luck that day. At the inn sat some peasants from Baturino. On seeing me, with that glad surprise with which the inhabitants of the same village meet in town, they all shouted together.

"There's our young master, isn't it? Welcome, sir! Don't be particular! Join us."

I joined them, also extremely glad, in the hope of getting home with them, and true, they at once offered me a lift. It turned out that they had come to fetch bricks, that their carts were just outside, at the brick-kilns next to Runaways Suburb, and that they were proposing to start on the homeward journey in the evening. The whole evening, however, passed in loading bricks. I spent one, two, three hours at the brick-kilns, gazing endlessly at the deserted evening fields stretching before me on the other side of the road, and meanwhile the peasants kept on loading their bricks. The vesper bells in town had died down, and the sun had sunk quite low over the reddened field—and still they were loading. I was simply exhausted with boredom and fatigue, when one of the peasants said jeeringly, struggling to the cart with a whole apronful of fresh pink bricks, and jerking his head

in the direction of the carriage drawn by three horses abreast, and raising dust on the track near the main road:

"And there's the Bibikov lady driving. She is coming to our parts, to Uvarov. He told me the other day that he was expecting her for a stay, and he haggled over a sheep to slaughter. . . . Gentlemen they call themselves, too!"

Another took it up:

"True, true, it's her. There is that skinflint on the box. . . . I saw them to-day at dinner-time near the smithy—they had some mishap with their wheel. . . ."

Instantly I started up, staring more intently, and recognized the piebald horses which had been standing just now before the library—and suddenly understood what it really was that had been secretly disturbing me since the moment I ran out: *she* had been disturbing me—that slim girl. When I heard that she was coming to our parts, to Baturino, I even jumped up from my place, poured out hasty questions at the peasants and learned at once a good deal: that the Bibikov lady was the girl's mother, that she was a widow, that the girl was studying at an institute in Voronezh—the peasants called it "noblemen's establishment"—that they lived in their little manor near Zadonsk, in very poor circumstances, that they were related to Uvarov, that the horses had been given them by another relative of theirs, their Zadonsk neighbour Markov,

that his piebald horses were notorious all over the county, just as the skinflint Caucasian who had been in Markov's employ, at first as usual, as horse-breaker, and then got used to him, became his bosom friend, bound up to him by a terrible affair: once he beat to death with cowhide a gipsy horse-thief who wanted to abduct from Markov's drove the principal brood-mare. . . .

We did not start till dusk, and dragged on the whole night at walking pace—as much as the two-ton load allowed the weak horses to do. And what a night it was! At dusk, as soon as we had got out to the main road, a wind began to blow, it began to grow dark, somehow rapidly and uncertainly, disquietingly, because of the clouds coming from the East; it began to roar heavily, shaking the sky and booming more and more terrifyingly, lightening it up with red summer-lightnings. . . . In half-an-hour pitch-darkness set in, and a wind, now hot, now quite cool, tore about-on all sides, the pink and white lightning, darting in all directions over the black fields, blinded one, and every minute one was deafened by monstrous thunderclaps which, with an incredible roaring and a dry, sizzling crackling, burst out right over our heads. And a real hurricane swept along madly, the lightning flames sparkled in the thunderclouds to their full height in notched white-heated serpents, with a fierce trembling and horror as if the Last Judgment were at hand—and a downpour burst which

lashed us with fierce booming to the sound of now ceaseless thunderclaps amid such apocalyptic flashing and flames that the infernal gloom of the heavens would seem to open up overhead to the uttermost depths, right to the seventh abyss of the celestial sanctuaries where, like some preternatural, timeless Himalaya, the mountains of clouds flashed sparkling with copper. . . . Lying on cold bricks and covered up with all the rags and coats which the peasants could give me, I was soaked through within five minutes. But what mattered that hell and flood to me! I was already under the full sway of my new love. . . .

## VIII

OF all that built and shaped the rest of my adolescence, my life during the last period of my being in the family, at home, which in a fair measure predetermined all my strange future—I again remember, of course, only fragments, only what my soul retained in accordance with its preferences.

That life, despite all its outward poverty, took the same poetically happy course, as this befitted the last and the most carefree offspring of the "friends of poetry, daydreams, and nature"—and of poetical books, let me add for my part.

Such books played a specially large part in my adolescent life, without making it in the least

bookish. Pushkin, for instance, was never mere reading-matter for me, but really a part of my life.

When did he enter into me? When did I come to know him and admit him into my soul? As I have already said, speaking of my childhood, he had been with me—and in a very peculiar way—practically from the very source of my days. I had heard of him since early childhood, and his name was always mentioned in our home with something like a family intimacy, like the name of a man who was quite “one of ourselves”, belonging, like us, to the same and very special set. He even seemed to me to write only *our* things, for *us*, and full of *our* feelings. The storm, which in his verses dimmed the sky with mist, “tossing up snowy whirlwinds”, was the same that raged on winter nights around Kamenka farm. Mother would sometimes read to me, with a sad and tender smile, “*Yesternight I sat with a hussar drinking a cup of grog*”—and I would ask: “What hussar, mother? Our dead uncle?” She would recite: “*A withered flower, 'odourless, I see forgotten in a book*”—and I saw that flower in her own girlish album. . . . As to my youth it all passed with Pushkin.

Inseparable from it was Lermontov, too:

“*Speechless lies the blue steppe, the Caucasus, like a silver ring, encircling it; over the sea, frowning, it sleeps quietly, like a giant bent over his shield, hearkening to the tales of wandering waves, and the Black Sea rumbles endlessly. . . .*”

These lines responded to a truly marvellous youthful longing for distant wanderings, awakening and forming my soul, to a passionate dream of things remote and beautiful, to a secret music of the soul! And yet most of all I communed with Pushkin. How many emotions he kindled in me! And how I made him accompany my own feelings and everything among which and by which I lived!

This life, of course, had plenty of prose, too; yet which prevailed—for me at least?

Here I wake up on a frosty sunny morning, and feel doubly happy because I can exclaim with him: "*Here's frost and sun a lovely day*"—with him who has so wonderfully described that morning and also given me a wonderful image and some ineffably wonderful sensations: "*You still doze, my charming friend. . . .*"

Here, waking up to see a blizzard, I recall that to-day we are to go out shooting, and again I begin my day as he did, with questions: "*. . . Is it warm? Has the blizzard stopped? Fresh snow or not? Can one leave bed for saddle, or would it be better to while away the morning with one's neighbour's old magazines?*"

Here there is spring twilight; Venus hangs golden over the trees; the windows are open into the garden; and again he is with me, voicing my secret dream: "*Hasten my fair one: love's golden star has risen in the sky.*"

Here it is already quite dark, and a nightingale's song rings tormentingly all over the garden: "*Did*

*you hear, beyond the copse, at night, the voice singing of love and of its own sorrow?"*

Here I am in bed, and a "sad candle" is burning beside me—really, a sad tallow candle, not an electric lamp—and who is this pouring out his youthful love, or rather the craving for it—he or myself? "*O Morpheus, give till morn a solace to my tormented love!*"

And here again "*the wood drops her crimson robe and the fields are wounded by fierce sports*"—the same to which I am so passionately addicted: "*How swiftly my new-shod horse scours the fields that lie so wide and open! How his hoofs ring clanging on the frozen earth!*"

At night a huge dim-red moon rises silently over our dead black garden—and again the marvellous words ring out: "*Ghostly behind the pinewood rose a misty moon*"—and my soul is filled with ineffable dreams of the unknown woman whom he has created, and who has captivated me for ever, walking in this still hour, somewhere in another, a far-off land—"*by the shores washed by rumbling waves*". . . .

## IX

My feelings for Lisa Bibikov, in spite of the genuine charm of her image, were nevertheless largely due to my childishness and my attachment to "poetry, daydreams, nature", and also to my fondness of our mode of life, with which all Russian poetry



had erstwhile been so closely connected, the whole structure of which invariably, and at times with surprising harmony, accompanied my outward and my inmost life in those days.

I was in love with Lisa in an old-fashioned, poetical way, as with a being belonging entirely to our set of people.

The spirit of that set, to which my imagination added a halo of romance, seemed to me the more beautiful as it was in process of vanishing for ever under my very eyes.

I saw our life growing poorer, but the more precious did it become to me; at times, oddly, I even rejoiced in that poverty . . . perhaps because here, too, I found a certain kinship with Pushkin, whose house, according to Yazykov's description, also presented a picture far from prosperous: "*Walls miserably papered here and there; a battered floor; two windows; between them a door of glass; a sofa in a corner, under the ikons; and a pair of chairs . . .*"

And Lisa too was "very, very poor", according to the Baturino peasants. But that made her in my eyes still more touching, and brought her still nearer. . . .

At the time, however, of Lisa's stay in Baturino, our poor life was enriched by hot June days, by thick verdure of shadowy gardens, by the smell of passing jasmin and blooming roses, by bathing in the pond which, on our bank, overshadowed by the garden and overgrown with thick cool grass,

was picturesquely shaded by tall willows, their glistening foliage, their sleek pliant branches. Thus Lisa became for ever associated in my memory with those first days of bathing, with June pictures and odours—of jasmin, of roses, of strawberries at dinner, of those willows on the bank, whose elongated leaves have a strong smell and a bitter taste, of tepid water and slime of the sun-warmed pond echoing at dinner-time with the constant gay shouting of young peasant girls and boys bathing on the opposite shore, from the bare, hot, clay hillocks whereon the water and sun made glittering reflections flow and ripple as with a mirror. . . .

I did not go to Uvarov's that summer—Glebochka was spending the summer near Kharkov in an agricultural school, to which he had been transferred on account of his scanty achievements at school; nor did the Uvarovs come to see us, the relations between us being strained—the everlasting story of petty country quarrels; yet Mme. Uvarov nevertheless asked my father's permission to bathe in the pond on our side, and used to come with the Bibikovs nearly every day, and now and then I would meet them, seemingly unawares, on the shore and bow to them with studied politeness, and Mme. Bibikov, who used to walk with an air of condescending gravity, her head up, dressed in a loose peignoir and with a bathing-towel on her shoulder, was soon answering me rather affably, and even smilingly, evidently remembering how

the other day, in town, I had jumped out of the library. Shyly at first, and then with increasing friendliness and eagerness Lisa would answer, too, already slightly sunburnt and with sparkle in her large eyes. She now wore a white sailor dress with blue collar, and a rather short blue skirt, and exposed to the sun her little black head with a dark, slightly curly pigtail tied with a large white bow. She did not bathe, but merely sat on the shore while her mother and Mme. Uvarov were bathing down where the willows grew especially thick; but sometimes she would take off her shoes to walk on the grass and enjoy its soft coolness, so that on several occasions I saw her barefoot. The whiteness of her small feet in the green grass was particularly charming. . . .

Once more came moonlit nights, and this time I took into my head not to sleep at all at night—to go to bed only at dawn, and to sit in my room, the livelong night, in absolute solitude, with candles as my sole light, reading and writing verses, then to wander in the garden, gazing at Uvarov's manor from the side of the dam. . . .

In daytime on that dam there often stood peasant women and girls, and, bending over a large flat smoothed-out stone lying in the water by the shore, their skirts tucked up above their knees—large, red and yet tender, womanly,—talking in quick, brisk voices, they would beat wet grey shirts with rollers, strongly and harmoniously; sometimes they

would stand erect, wipe away the sweat from their brows with tucked-up sleeves, and with playful insolence, hinting at something, say to me whenever I happened to pass: "Lost anything mister?"—and then would bend down again and beat and whack still more vigorously, exchanging remarks, and I would hasten away: it was already difficult for me to look at them thus stooping, and to see their bare knees. . . .

Then another of our neighbours, the one whose manor was across the road from ours and whose son was in exile, old Alferov, had a visit from relations, young ladies from St. Petersburg; and one of these, the youngest, Asya, was good-looking, handy and tall, merry and energetic, free-mannered in a way different from ours. She liked playing croquet, taking snapshots at random with her camera, riding; and imperceptibly I became rather a frequent visitor to that manor, concluded a sort of friendship with Asya in which she both maltreated me as a mere boy, and at the same time obviously enjoyed my boyish company. Time and again she would take a snapshot of me—and always unsuccessfully, because always hastily; for whole hours we would knock about with croquet mallets, and it always turned out that I was making a mess of things, and she would pause every minute and very nicely, dropping her "L"s shout at me in utter despair: "Oh, how si'y, goodness, how si'y!"; but best of all we liked galloping late in the after-

noon along the highroad, and I must own that I could no longer listen quite tranquilly to her glad shouts on horseback, or view her coloured cheeks and flying hair, or feel our solitude in the fields while I saw her figure, graceful as a lyre, posed superbly in the saddle, and her taut left foot, pressing the stirrup, kept flashing from under the floating skirt of her habit. . . .

But that was at daytime, or in the evening. And my nights I devoted to poetry.

Here it is already quite dark in the fields, the warm dusk thickens, and Asya and I are returning at a walking-pace, passing through the village, with all its summer evening smells. After taking Asya as far as her house, I enter the courtyard of our manor, throw the bridle of the sweating Kabardinka to a farmhand; still saddled, she turns her head wearily towards the stables and follows him, while I hurry indoors to supper, where I am met with the gay banter of my brothers and my sister-in-law. After supper, I come out for a walk with them, to the common behind the pond or again to the same highway, looking at the gloomily red moon rising beyond the fields, from which soft even warmth is wafted up. And after the walk I at last remain alone. Everything is hushed, everything asleep—the house, the manor, the village, the moonlit fields. I sit by the open window, and read or write. The night wind, grown just a shade cooler, comes in puffs from the garden,

here and there already lit up, and shakes the flames of guttering candles. The night moths flutter in swarms round them crackling as they burn themselves with an agreeable smell; as they fall they gradually strew the whole desk. An irresistible sleepiness makes me drop my head, close my eyelids—oh, I wish I could plump down on the bed and instantly fall sound asleep!—but I do my best to overcome and defeat it . . . and all for the sake of what? For the sake of that schoolgirl whom I want to love and whom, as it seems to me, I do love with the best, the inmost part of my soul, for the sake of the secret poetical life I share with her on those summer nights, nights the like of which, it seems, shall never be again. . . .

And by midnight, as a rule, sleep would be dispelled. I would rise, blow out the candles and go into the garden. Now, in June, the moon followed its summer course, walked still lower. Round the corner of the house it stood, its broad shadow reaching far across the lawn; and from that shadow it was particularly pleasing to look up at a seven-coloured star twinkling quietly in the east, far beyond the garden, beyond the village, beyond the summer fields, whence at times, hardly audible and therefore particularly charming, came the distant clucking of a partridge. The ancient lime-tree near the house was in blossom, and smelt sweetly; warm and golden was the moon; there was no dew. And again only the warmth was

drifted up—as is usual before the dawn, the approach of which was already discernible yonder, in the eastern sky, where the horizon was already faintly silvering. It was drifted up from that side, from beyond the pond, and quietly I walked down the garden to meet that drift, and went down to the dam. . . . The courtyard of the Uvarov manor merged into the village common, and the garden beyond the house—into the field; I was familiar with that house, and used to go there nearly every day in Glebochka's time. And now, looking at it from the dam, I figured exactly where everyone was sleeping. I knew that Lisa slept in Glebochka's room, the one whose windows looked also into a garden, though not one like ours, but dark, thick, pressing close upon them. . . . And how can I express my feelings as I looked, fancying Lisa sleeping there, in that room, to the accompaniment of leaves lispings like a quietly streaming rain, behind the open windows through which, now and again, that warm wind blew in from the fields, nursing that half-childish sleep of hers, than which nothing on earth seemed to me purer or more lovely!

## X

THIS strange mode of life was the stranger for having lasted nearly the whole summer. And when it changed it did so, as usually happens,

unexpectedly and abruptly. One fine morning I suddenly learnt that the Bibikovs were no longer in Baturino—they had left the day before. I remember having spent the day very listlessly,—not knowing what to do with myself; late in the afternoon I went to Asya—and what did I hear?

“And we are going to the Crimea to-morrow,” she said as soon as she saw me, as blithely as if she meant to make me very glad. . . .

That day the summer's feast of poesy ended for me. Instead of sitting down at my desk after supper I went to bed, and slept a sound and sorrowful sleep the whole night through. The world thereafter became so empty and boring that I took to going to the fields where they had already begun mowing our rye; I would sit for hours on end on the swaths in the field gazing aimlessly at the mowers. There I sit, and around me is the drought, the glitter, the hot and motionless glow, the regular swish of the scythes; like a solid and high wall, against the blueness of the sky, grey in the heat, mounts a sea of dry, sandy-yellow rye, with full-cared, obediently bent spikes, and upon it advance the ungirdled peasants one after another, walking bandy-legged, moving slowly and evenly forward; their rustling scythes gleam in the sun as they leave one swath after another lying to the left of them, leaving behind them the yellow stubble looking like a prickly brush—wide, empty stripes, and gradually they bare the field ever more and



more, make it look like something quite new, open up fresh outlooks and vistas.

"But why sit idle, sir?" one of the mowers, a tall, handsome, blackhaired fellow, addressed me, somewhat unceremoniously but amicably. "Take my spare scythe and join us. . . ."

I rose, and without a word went to his cart. Then it began.

At first it was very painful. The speed, and every sort of clumsiness, so exhausted me that in the evening I could hardly get home—my back bent and broken, my arms aching below the shoulders, and my hands smarting with bloody blisters, my face burnt, my hair clotted with dried sweat, feeling a great thirst and a wormwood bitterness in my mouth. But afterwards I got so used to my voluntary task that I would even go to sleep with a blissful thought: "Mowing again to-morrow!"

After the mowing came the carting. This work is even harder. It is even worse—to thrust the pitchfork into a thick, dry, stiff sheaf, to lever up its slippery handle with one's knee and at one go, making one's stomach ache, fling up that magnificent rustling load, whilst it pours down on you its sharp grains, up on to the high cart-load, growing bigger and bigger on the ever dwindling cart, the rumps of sheafs sticking out on all sides . . . and then to girdle its top-heavy mountain, pricking on all sides and smelling stuffily of rye-warmth,

with hard new ropes, to draw them tight with all one's might, to bind them fast to the cart . . . and then to walk slowly behind its swelling pile along the rutted and pitted cart-track, ankle-deep in the hot thick dust, all the time watching the horse looking so insignificant under its cartload, and inwardly to strain all the time with it, to fear all the time that the miserable cart, everywhere creaking under its terrible load, would give way at some turning, that a wheel would clog too abruptly—and that all the load would topple hideously over. . . . All this is no trifling matter, especially when one's bare head is exposed to the sun, one's hot, sweating chest smarts with corn chaff, one's legs tremble with overwork, and one's mouth is full of wormwood! Later on, all these days were blended for me into one long, single, joyful day, and I grew so rough and strong that I could, it seemed, outdo any peasant. Mentally, too, I grew considerably stronger. . . .

In Septémber I used to spend all my days in the farmyard. There was a spell of greyish, miserable, chilly weather. In the cornyard, from early morning till late at night, a threshing-machine would roar and boom, and pitch the straw about and raise thick clouds of chaff; some women and young girls were working briskly under it with their rakes, their dusty kerchiefs pulled low over their eyes, while others made the winnowing-machine hum

evenly in one of the dark corners, turning the handle of the fans that blew up the corn inside, singing all the time with plaintive sweetness, and I would listen to them, now taking my place next to one of them so as to turn the handle, now helping them to gather the pure grain from beneath the winnowing-machine into a measure, and afterwards pour it with pleasure into an open sack standing near by. I felt ever nearer and friendlier towards those women and young girls, and goodness knows what it all would have come to—already one long-legged, red-haired wench, who used to sing most dashingly and most skilfully of all, and at the same time, notwithstanding all her apparent pertness and roughness, with a peculiar sad soulfulness, openly hinted that she would not refuse anything, for, say, a pair of new scissors—had not a new event occurred in my life: unexpectedly I found my way into, not an illustrated magazine this time, but one of the most important St. Petersburg monthlies, and I turned out to be in the company of the most renowned writers of the time, even receiving for it a money-order for the goodly sum of fifteen roubles. “No,” said I to myself, upset by both these facts, “enough of that cornyard for me! I must take to my books and writings again.” And I went at once to saddle Kabardinka: I intended to go to town, obtain the money—and set to work. . . . It was already nearly evening, but I went all the same to the stables,

saddled the horse and spurred it on through the village, along the high road. . . . Out in the fields it was sad, deserted, cold, inhospitable, yet how full of eagerness and freshness, of readiness for life and belief in it, was my youthful, lonely soul!

## XI

It is with grief that I now remember that infinitely remote autumn evening which then seemed to me so happy. A whole life has passed since then. And who knows how it would have passed had that evening not existed?

In the field it was growing gloomily dark; a sharp wind blew, and I breathed freely its late-autumnal freshness, felt with delight its healthy chill on my hot young face, and spurred Kabardinka on and on. I had always loved fast riding, and always took to the horses I rode; yet I was always terribly merciless to them. And here I rode especially fast. Did I think, did I dream of anything in particular? But whenever something important, or at least significant, occurs in one's life and one has to draw some conclusion from it or take some decision, one thinks little, but rather yields oneself to the secret working of the soul. And I well remember that all the way into town my soul, roused into virile vigour, was working ceaselessly at some problem. What problem? I didn't know as yet; once more I felt a craving for some change in my

life, for freedom from something, and a striving towards somewhere. . . .

I remember that near Stanovaya I halted for a moment. Night was falling, and the fields were still gloomier and sadder. There was not a soul, it seemed, not only on that desolate, quite forsaken road but also for hundreds of miles around. Desolation, wide expanse, wilderness. . . . "Lovely," I thought, giving the horse her head. Kabardinka stopped, heaving her flanks deeply and standing rigid. Feeling numb in the knees, I got off the warm slippery saddle, casting round me a vigilant and cautious glance, remembering the old stories of robbers about Stanovaya, and secretly even longing for some terrible meeting, for an uncanny encounter with someone; I tightened the saddle-girth and the leather belt round my coat, and adjusted the dagger hanging from it. The wind blew into my side pressing it closely like cold water, striking and roaring in my ears, making something rustle disquietingly and stealthily out in the fields amid the dry weeds and the reaped corn. Kabardinka, the stirrups swinging at her sides and the saddle-horns standing out, stood there looking wonderfully slender, her ears cocked, aware, also, one would think, of all the evil repute of that spot, and also looking keenly and sternly down the road. Already she was quite dark with hot sweat, she had even grown thinner in the ribs and flanks; but I knew her power of endurance, knew that the single deep breath

which she took in when she stopped sufficed for her to begin galloping again, though no longer young, to the full extent of her strength, of her unfailing patience and affection for me. And after fondling her with particular affection and kissing her sensitive nose, I jumped into the saddle again and rode on faster than ever. . . .

Then came the night, dark and obscure, a real autumn night, and as in a dream one began thinking that there would be no end to this gloom, to the head wind, and to the harmonious beat of hooves in the dense darkness underfoot. . . . Then the distant lights of the town and suburbs opened up, for a long time seeming to stand still, seen with that particular sharpness and distinctness peculiar to autumn nights. At last they came nearer, larger, and the wooden roofs of the suburb houses showed black along the dark road, and beneath them the small shining windows looked out alluringly and cosily, showing the bright interiors of the cottages, their inmates supping there in families. . . . And then it began to smell distinctly of all the complex odours of a populous town, numerous other lights and lighted windows began to flash past—and Kabardinka's shoes rang gaily and exhilaratingly on the cobbled streets. In the town it was stiller and warmer; it was still evening, and not that black blind night which had long descended upon the open country, and I arrived at Nazarov's inn just in time for supper. . . .

How full was my soul that night! Not that I felt too excited, too happy, because I had found my way into a famous review, among famous writers—that, I remember, I took almost for granted. I merely felt somehow strongly and agreeably roused. I was fully in control of all my faculties, of all my mental and bodily sensibilities, and everything gave me a wonderful delight: that autumn evening in town; and the way in which, after trotting up to Nazarov's gate, I began pulling the ring of the rusty wire hanging down from a hole in the post, sounding the bell loudly all over the courtyard; and the way in which, clattering on the cobbles, the limping steps of the caretaker came from behind the gate as he was opening the gate to me; and the cosiness of the dung-covered stable-yard where, in darkness, under the black sheds and under the open, starlit, clearing sky, stood carts and loudly munching horses, forming a real camp; the peculiar, old, provincial, foulness of the privy in the impenetrable darkness of that small ante-room where I mounted, my feet leaden with cold, up the rotten steps of the wooden porch, and where I fumbled long for the bolt of the house-door; and the bright kitchen, warm and crowded, which then suddenly opened with its thick smell of hot, greasy, salted meat and of supping peasants, and behind it—the clean quarters where, at a big round table, brightly lit by a hanging lamp, presided over by the stout pockmarked hostess with a long upper

lip, and the old host, a stern, morose man, a big bony fellow whose nondescript lank hair and Suzdal nose made him look like an Old Believer, there also sat at supper many sunburnt, weather-beaten people, in waistcoats, and high-collared shirts hanging loose from beneath the waistcoats. . . . All except the innkeeper drank vodka, ate the scummy cabbage-soup, with meat and bayberry leaves floating in it, from a huge common bowl, talking animatedly about something or other. . . . "Oh, lovely!" I felt, O, how lovely everything is—that wild inhospitable night in the fields, and this friendly, evening life in the town, those peasants and townsfolk drinking and eating, all that old provincial Russia with its coarseness, complexity, strength, domesticity, and my hazy dreams of some fairy St. Petersburg, of Moscow, of famous writers, and the fact that I, too, am just going to have a good drink, and to set to with a wolf's appetite on the cabbage-soup and the soft, white, wholemeal bread! Indeed I ate and drank such a lot that afterwards (when everybody at the inn had scattered after supper and gone to bed wherever they chanced—in the courtyard, in the kitchen, on the hard sofas, and some even on the floor. on felt rugs; had put out the lights and fallen sound asleep, surrendering completely to bed-bugs and cock-roaches), I sat long hatless on the porch steps, refreshing my slightly dizzy head with the frosty air of the October night, listening in the nocturnal



stillness now to the watchman's rattle, cleverly executing a dance-tune somewhere away along the deserted street, now to the peaceful crunching of the horses under the sheds, sometimes interrupted by their brief scuffle and angry neighing, and all the time thinking out, deciding, something with my blissfully tipsy mind. . . .

As a matter of fact everything was already decided: on that night I first conceived my plan of sooner or later leaving Baturino.

## XII

THE night I spent rather badly. The innkeeper and his wife were the only ones to sleep apart, in a bedroom that looked like a chapel with its multitude of golden and silver ikons in a case rising like a black upright tomb in the front corner, behind a large crimson ikon-lamp, while we all had to sleep in the same room that we had supped in the night before. Three of us spent the night on the floor, on felt rugs, the other three, myself unfortunately among them, on sofas, hard as stone, of course, with upright wooden backs. And all night long, besides, I was of course devoured by bed-bugs, (small ones, particularly venomous, which darted off cravenly all over the pillow as soon as I struck a match); and from the warm, odorous darkness around rose a loud snoring which made the night seem hopeless and unending, and some-

times that tireless rattle flaunted its terribly loud, voluptuous, bold, round and hollow clatter right underneath the windows, and the door to the hosts' bedroom was left ajar so that the ikon-lamp threw its red light right into my eyes, its black cross-shaped cork-float, its dark radiant glimmer, and the oscillating shadows it sent forth resembling some fairy-tale spider in the midst of an enormous web. . . . I rose, however, as if nothing were the matter as soon as I heard the innkeeper and his wife wake up, and those who slept on the floor started yawning, rising, lighting cigarettes and pulling on their boots, and the cook ran in treading on their feet and the felt rugs, dragging a huge boiling samovar smelling nicely of charcoal, and bumped it with one swing on the table, its thick steam at once dimming the window-panes and mirror.

An hour later I was already at the post-office, where at last I received my first fee, and that wonderful thick book, different from any other book in the world, in its virginally fresh yolk-coloured wrapper, containing my poem, which just at first seemed even to myself not to be mine—it looked so pleasantly like some lovely real poem by a real poet. After that I had some business to do—to call, at my father's request, on a certain Ivan Andreevich Balavin, a grain-dealer, in order to show some samples of our grain, enquire about their price and if possible sign a sale contract. And now,

from the post-office, I made my way straight to his store, but I walked in such a way that the peasants and townsfolk whom I met looked with surprise at this young man in top boots, in a blue cap and coat to match, who now and then slowed down in his walk and sometimes would even stop dead in the middle of the street, staring all the time at one and the same spot in a book which he held open before his eyes, obviously unable to sate his gaze on it. . . .

Only at the market did I recover my senses.<sup>41</sup> It was again murky and cold; there was a stimulating late autumn air; in churches the bells tolled for Mass; all around me buying and selling was going on, people went to and fro, talking briskly in a businesslike way, making one desire to go to Moscow, to Nizhny, or at least to Orel or Tula. In the fish-row was the sharp smell of salted fish, so that one felt a craving to be somewhere on the Azov Sea, in Rostov or in Tsaritsyn, and I recalled the last autumn when I used to go to Riverside, to the station, to meet the trains, for the sake of enjoying the mere sight of them, and dreams of those unknown towns from which came and to which were going the countless passengers thronging the station and trains. How remote that time was already, I thought, and how everything has changed since—especially myself. In the next row of stores, where, over the passage, supported on chains in the air, hung a large old ikon in a

blackened frame which used to terrify me somewhat when a child, one could buy accordions, inferior sorts of tobacco and those penny chap-books and smelly and sticky coloured woodcuts which in those days used to circulate in millions all over rural Russia; and for an instant I felt myself to be again that nice, pathetic boy who, dressed in his first brand-new school uniform, used to buy here the tales of Guak, of Bova the Prince, of chieftain Epancha, the "genuine story" entitled *The Battle of the Russians against the Kabardinians, or The Beautiful Mohamedan Dying on her Husband's Tomb*, used to stare at the dazzlingly bright and fresh colours of the portraits of the broad-shouldered Tsar, with his curly fair beard and clever, bulging eyes, whose uniform was covered with multicoloured decorations, of the meek and comely Tsarina in a headband studded with pearls, of the manly and handsome grand-dukes with partly shaven chins and gorgeous bushy whiskers. . . . "To St. Petersburg, to St. Petersburg!"—I thought suddenly, and walked faster.

And the meeting with Balavin added further to my excitement.

He received me at first dryly and even unfriendly, with that groundless hostility which is often met with among Russian traders. His grain store in the corn-row had its shutters flush with the pavement. The shop assistant led me through that store to the far end, to a little glass door curtained on the inside

with a piece of scarlet stuff, and tapped hesitatingly.

"Come in!" shouted someone disagreeably from behind the door.

I entered, and to meet me there rose from behind a large desk a man of nondescript age, dressed in quite a European fashion, with a very clean yellowish face, seeming almost transparent, with whitish hair neatly combed and parted in the middle, with a fine yellow moustache and a quick look in his light green eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked dryly and curtly.

I told him what it was, mentioned my name, drew out from my coat pocket, hurriedly and clumsily, the two little bags with grain, and laid them before him on the desk.

"Sit down," he said rather casually, again taking his seat at the desk; and without looking at me he began to undo the bags. Having done so, he took out a handful of one sort of grain, threw it up on his palm, rubbed it between his fingers and smelt, then repeated the same operation with the other sort.

"How much altogether?" he asked carelessly.

"How many bushels, you mean?" I asked.

"Well, not waggons I suppose," he said mockingly. "After all your estate can't be so big. . . ."

I flushed, but he did not let me answer.

"That is of no consequence, however. Prices are weak at present: you know that yourself, I suppose."

And after mentioning his price he proposed to fetch the grain the very next day.

"I accept that price," I said blushing. "Could I get an advance?"

He silently extracted his wallet from his side-pocket, gave me a hundred-rouble note, and with a characteristic, very accurate gesture replaced the wallet.

"Do you want a receipt?" I queried, blushing still more, and feeling awkwardly pleased with my grown-upness and businesslike manner.

He grinned, replied that Alexander Sergeevich Arseniev was, thank God, well enough known to everybody; and, as if wishing to intimate to me that the business conversation was over, he opened a silver cigarette case which lay on his desk and handed it to me.

"Thanks, I don't smoke," I said.

He lit a cigarette and asked again in his casual manner:

"Is it you who write poetry?"

I looked at him with great amazement, but again he did not let me answer.

"Don't be surprised at my taking an interest in such things, too," he said with a grin. "I am also, if I may say so, a poet. I even published a book once. Now I have naturally given up the lyre—no time, and the talent turned out to be a small one—I write only correspondences for newspapers, as you may have heard, but I still take an interest

in literature, subscribe to many newspapers and reviews. It is, unless I am mistaken, your first appearance in a monthly review? Let me heartily wish you success, and advise you not to neglect yourself."

"How do you mean?" I asked quite amazed now by the sudden turn our business interview was taking.

"I mean that you ought to think very seriously about your future. You'll forgive me for saying it, but for literary occupations one must possess some means and a sound education; and what have you got? Take myself. Without any false modesty I can say that I was not a duffer; when still a small boy I had seen as much as I wish to God any tourist might see. Yet what did I write? It's a shame to remember. Here's an example:

I came to life amid the waste of steppes,  
In ordinary, stuffy cottage,  
Where swinging sleeping boards  
Replaced the carven furniture. . . .

"I ask myself what imbecile wrote that? In the first place, it is false. I was never born in a steppe cottage; I was born in town. Secondly, it is rather silly to compare sleeping boards to some carved furniture. And thirdly, sleeping boards never swing. And didn't I know all that? I knew

it quite well, but I could not help saying this nonsense because I was uneducated, uncultivated and too poor to receive education. . . . Fare you well," he added, suddenly rising, holding out his hand, shaking mine firmly, and looking intently into my eyes. "Let me serve as an occasion for serious reflexion about yourself. To sit still in the country, to see nothing of life, to write and read at random, and to fall more and more into habits of laziness, of indolence, is not a brilliant outlook. Yet one can see that you possess a real talent and, forgive my frankness, you give a very pleasant impression. . . ."

And suddenly he again became dry and earnest:

"Good-bye," he said, again somewhat casually, dismissing me with a nod and once more sitting down to his desk. "Remember me, please, to your father. . . ."

Thus unexpectedly my secret intention to leave Baturino received a fresh confirmation.

### XIII

THAT intention, however, was not realised soon.

The dream of realizing it on the spot, at such an early stage, was of course nonsense. Secretly, I understood it myself, and my life, after that memorable ride to town, pursued its former course and was even more care-free—in the simple delight of its flow, of the succession of days, interrupted only by occasional vain attempts at regular work. I



was being gradually turned—outwardly at least—into an ordinary country youth, already rather accustomed to sit in his manor, no longer estranged from its everyday existence, used to go shooting, to call on his neighbours, on rainy or stormy days to go to the village, to favourite cottages, to while away one's time in the family circle round the samovar, or else to lie whole days long with a book on the sofa, to dream aloud about something with one's sister, to chat with one's brothers. . . . And so another year passed. And then happened something which had to happen sooner or later, which comes in due time to every one, and sometimes as a great calamity.

Our neighbour Alferov, who used to lead a lonely life, died. My brother Nicholas, who had long dreamt of living on his own, leased his vacated manor and lived there that winter instead of with us. Among his servants there was a maid called Tonka. She had just married, but immediately after the wedding had been forced by poverty and homelessness to part with her husband: he was a saddler and after marrying went off again on his ambulant work, whilst she took up work with my brother.

She was about twenty. In the village people called her "the jackdaw", "the savage", and thought her, for her quietness, quite stupid. I myself had known her, of course, since childhood, as I knew everybody in our village, and I always

liked her. She had a very dark complexion, a gracefully and firmly built girl's body, small and strong limbs, black nut-brown, narrow-slitted eyes. She resembled a Red Indian. the straight but rather rough features of a dark face, the coarse jet of lank hair. But in that, too, I found some charm, though truly a somewhat savage one. As for stupidity, I never heard her say anything silly—perhaps because she said only what was quite necessary and commonplace, keeping silence as easily and naturally as if she were speechless.

I used to go nearly every day to my brother's; I admired her; I even liked the firm, swift tread of her feet when she brought the samovar or soup-tureen to table, the way in which she would meaninglessly look up: that stamping and that look, the coarse blackness of her hair parted in the middle and showing beneath an orange-coloured kerchief, the somewhat flat, bluish lips of her slightly elongated mouth, the slope of the dark youthful neck passing into shoulders—all this invariably roused in me a sweet and uneasy yearning. Sometimes, meeting her in the hall, or the anteroom, I would jestingly catch at her as she went, and press her to the wall. Laughing silently, she would adroitly slip away—and with that the matter ended. There was no amorous feeling between us.

But once, walking in soft winter dusk through the village, I turned absent-mindedly to Alferov's

manor, passed between the snow-heaps to the house, mounted to the porch. In the dark ante-room, especially dark at the top, a pile of red-hot embers in the freshly lighted stove showed red, gloomy and fantastic as in a black cave, and Tonka, bareheaded, straddling her bare legs, their tibias shining against the light with their smooth skin, was sitting on the floor against its mouth, illumined by its dark flames, holding a poker in her hand, its white-hot end touching the embers; slightly averting from the glowing heat her dark flaming face, she was dreamily gazing at the embers, at their crimson mounts, frail and translucent, here already dying away under the fine lilac efflorescence, and there still burning with blue-green gas. I banged the door when entering—she did not even turn round.

"Why is it dark here? Is no one at home?" I asked, approaching her.

She threw her face further back, and, without looking at me, smiled somewhat uneasily and languidly.

"As if you don't know!" she said mockingly, and pushed the poker a little further into the stove.

"Know what?"

"Come on, stop it. . . ."

"Stop what?"

"You must know where they are, as they've gone to you. . . ."

"I've been taking a walk, I haven't seen them."

"Tell me about walks . . ."

I squatted on the floor, looking at her bare legs and at her bare black head, already full of inward tremors, but laughing and pretending also to admire the embers and their hot dark-crimson glow . . . Then suddenly I sat down beside her, embraced her, and threw her on the floor, catching her reluctant lips, hot because of the fire. The poker rattled, some sparks flew up from the stove. . . .

When afterwards I jumped out to the porch, I looked like a man who had suddenly committed murder, I held my breath and quickly turned round to see whether someone was not coming. But there was no one; everything to my surprise was ordinary and quiet; in the village, in the accustomed winter darkness, the lights burned in the cottages with an incredible calmness—as if nothing had happened. . . . I looked up, listened—and quickly walked away. I could not feel the ground beneath me, for two clashing emotions: the sense of a sudden, terrible, irremediable catastrophe in my life, and that of an exultant, victorious triumph. . . .

At night, through my anxious sleep, I was now and then seized by deadly anguish, by the sense of something terrible, criminal, and shameful that had suddenly caused my undoing. "Yes, everything is over," I would think, waking up, recovering my senses with difficulty. "Everything, everything is finished, destroyed, spoilt; obviously this must be

so; it can no longer be remedied or put straight. And the terrible thing is that one cannot tell it to anyone: everybody is asleep; they know nothing; they suspect nothing; and to crown all, I am now a stranger to everybody, alone in the wide world. . . ."

Waking up in the morning, I looked with quite new eyes around me, at that room so familiar to me, lit evenly by the fresh snow which had fallen in the night: there was no sun, but in the room it was quite light from the bright whiteness. My first thought on opening my eyes was, of course, about what had happened. But that thought no longer frightened me; of the anguish, despair, shame, feeling of guilt, there was none in my soul. On the contrary. But how can I go down to tea now?—I thought. And what should I do in general? Well, nothing, I thought; nobody knows anything, and nobody will ever know, and in the world everything is just as nice as before and even more so than before: outside is my favourite, still, white weather; the garden, its bare branches covered with shaggy snow, is all piled over with white snowheaps; in the room it is warm because of the stove lit by somebody while I slept and now roaring and cracking evenly, flutteringly drawing in the brass lid. . . . It smells bitter and fresh, through the warmth, from the frosted and thawing aspen brushwood lying next to it on the floor. . . . And what happened is only that natural,

necessary thing which had to happen—after all I am already seventeen and why should I be worse than the others? I am not only no worse, but even better than they, and at least I have matched them in that too. I was once more overwhelmed with triumph, pride, happiness—here I am man, I've got a mistress! How silly were all my night-time thoughts! How wonderful and terrible was the happening of yesterday! And it will be repeated again, perhaps even to-day! With what a lovely, unexpectedly childish fear, with what obvious hopelessness did she manage to whisper something rapid and imploring! O, how I do and will love her!

#### XIV

FROM that day on, a dreadful time began for me.

It was a real madness which engrossed all my mental and bodily forces, a life made up only of moments of passion, or of their expectation; and of torments of the most cruel jealousy, which really tore my heart asunder when Tonka's husband came to see her and she had to go away at night from the house where she usually slept, to sleep with him in the servants' quarters.

Did she love me? At first she did; she was secretly, but so completely, happy with that love that, try as she might, she could not hide her secret admiration for me, or the glitter of her narrow drooped eyes, even when she saw me in the presence

of my brother and his wife, as she waited on us. Afterwards, she sometimes loved me, and sometimes did not—at times she would be indifferent, cold, and even hostile—and those constant changes in feeling, always incomprehensible and unexpected, utterly exhausted me. At times I loathed her; yet even then the mere thought of her dark-silvery eardrops, of that tender and lovely, still very youthful something in her lips, in the oval of the lower part of her face, and in the drooping narrow eyes, the mere recollection of the coarse smell of her hair mixed with the smell of her kerchief, body and her breath, made me quiver all over. I was ready then—and even with some greedy joy—for every humiliation before her, provided only that the first happy days of our intimacy would return, be it even for a moment.

I did my best to lead, at least outwardly, a life as respectable as I could, as like as possible to that which I formerly led, but all my days had long ago been turned into a mere semblance of my former existence.

Winter passed; spring came; it was already May—I paid heed to nothing. I remember that for some reason I was stubbornly learning English. . . . What for?

God saved me unexpectedly.

It was a wonderful May day. I was sitting with a textbook of the English language in my hand, by the open window in my room. Next to me, on the

balcony, were heard the voices of my brothers, my sister-in-law and my mother. I listened absent-mindedly, and looking dully at the book, my head was full of desperate thoughts. I felt greatly tempted to dash for a moment to Alferov's manor, seeing that my brother and his wife were with us and Tonka would probably be alone. At the same time my soul was weighed down by such a painful sense of my utter depravity, and I felt such bitterness and pain, such pity for myself and for my ruined youth, that thoughts of death came as it were gladly to my mind. The garden would now shine with hot sunlight and buzz with bees, now stand shrouded in a fine, and unfathomable blue shadow; in the infinitely remote blueness, still young and springlike, and at the same time bright and rich, an infinitely high large cloud would billow up and cover the sun, and the air would slowly grow dark blue, the sky would seem still vaster, still higher, and from those heights, away in the happy springlike void of the universe, there would come suddenly the first faint sounds of thunder, as it were mercifully and magnificently, with gradually increasing sonority and resonance. . . . I took up a pencil, and, still thinking of death, began to write on the textbook:

*"And again and again, above your head, between the clouds and the blue darkness of trees, the skies will be filled with blue, celestially pure and blissful, and again the*



*billowy clouds will shine behind the trees, with heavenly snows, and a humble-bee cling to a flower's crown, and the god of Spring shall roll forth his mighty thunders—and I, where shall I be?"*

"Are you there?" said my brother Nicholas, in a stern, unusual tone, approaching my window. "Come out for a moment, I have something to tell you. . . ."

I was conscious of growing pale, yet rose and jumped out through the window.

"Tell me what?" I asked with an unnatural calm.

"Let's go for a stroll," he said dryly, walking in front of me towards the pond. "But, please, do take sensibly what I am going to say. . . ."

And pausing, he turned towards me:

"Look here, my dear chap, you realize, of course, that the whole affair has been everybody's secret?"

"What affair?" I asked, with difficulty but brusquely.

"Oh, you know very well. . . . So I want to warn you: this morning I dismissed her. Otherwise the whole thing would probably have ended in murder. Yesterday he returned and came straight to me. 'Nicholas Alexandrovich, I've known everything for a long time back. Let Antonina go at once, otherwise it will end badly. . . .' And, you see, he was as white as chalk, and his lips so dry that he could hardly speak. . . . I earnestly

advise you to be sensible and not try to see her any more. Besides, it is no use—to-day they are going away to stay somewhere near Livny. . . .”

I said not a word in reply, walked ahead of him, went to the pond, and sat on the grassy shore under the young glossy willow branches which arched down towards the silvery mirror of the water. Another magnificent roar came from somewhere in the fathomless voids on high, then something began to rustle heavily and rapidly, and round me rose a smell of the damp freshness of the spring verdure. . . . A straight, sparse rain sparkled out in long glassy threads from another big cloud which raised its snowy pinions infinitely high, straight above me, and on the still, even surface of the glassy-white water began a leaping of countless nails, pattering sharply, and scattering its surface with tiny dark spots. . . .

## **BOOK FOUR**



## I

My last days at Baturino were also the last of the former life of our family.

We were all aware of the approaching end of the old order of things: "Our brood is flying off, darling," my father would remark to my mother. Nicholas indeed had already left the nest, and George was about to do likewise—the term of his subjection to police control was over. I alone remained; but my turn was near too.

And yet, as is usual, none of us (except, of course, my mother) took the trouble to think matters out, and I least of all. Heaven knows why or wherefore, but I then set about translating *Hamlet*, and tortured myself over this with an intense and rising delight. . . .

## II

ONCE more, Spring came round again. And again it seemed to me to be such as had never been before, the beginning of something quite unlike all my past.

In every convalescence there is one particular morning when, on waking up, one at last fully realizes that simplicity, that everydayness, which

simply means health, a return to the normal state, different though it may be from the one that preceded the illness—because of a certain new experience, wisdom. Thus it was, too, that I woke up one quiet and sunny May morning in my corner-room, the windows of which, by right of my youth, I had no need to curtain. I flung off the blanket, feeling a quiet satisfaction in all my young vigour and all that healthy, youthful warmth which during the night I had imparted to myself and to the bed. The sun was looking through the windows; blue and ruby spots from the coloured window-panes were burning on the floor. I lifted the lower window-frame—it was already like a summer morning, full of the peaceful simplicity proper to Summer, of its soft pure morning air, the odours of the sunlit garden with all its herbs, flowers, butterflies. I washed, dressed, and began praying before the ikons which hung in the southern corner of the room and always evoked in me, by their Arseniev antiquity, a sense of comfort, of submission to the unfailing and infinite flow of earthly days. From the balcony again, as on that memorable day when Tonka left, came voices. They were drinking tea and talking. Again my brother Nicholas was there—he used to rise very early and often came to have tea with us in the morning. And he was talking—evidently about me—with his wonted sobriety:

“Well, what else can be done? Naturally he

must work; he must take up some job. . . . George, I think, after all, will manage to find something for him as soon as he gets something himself. . . ."

Those words comforted me still more. Well, if work one must, so much the better. Besides, there's time enough—George isn't going before autumn, and we still have ages till then. . . .

How remote those days are. It already needs an effort to recall them now, as belonging to myself, notwithstanding their closeness when I think of them as I write this, trying continually to revive some distant youthful image. Whose image is it? It is, as it were, a likeness of my fictitious younger brother, who long ago vanished from the world, along with all his infinitely remote times.

I sometimes happened to pick up in a strange house an old photograph-album. Strange and complex were the feelings evoked in me by the faces of those who looked at me from its faded pictures. First, a sense of extraordinary estrangement from all those faces, for there are moments when a man feels utterly estranged from his fellow-beings. And then, rising from that sense, an acutely intense awareness of those men and of their epoch. Who were these creatures, these faces? All were human beings who had lived some time and somewhere, each in his own way, with different destinies and in different epochs where everything bore its peculiar stamp; clothes, customs, temperaments, public moods and happenings. . . . Here was an

austere-looking, old, important official, with the medal of an order under his cravat, with a large high collar, with the broad, fleshy features of a clean-shaven face. Here was a society fop of Herzen's day, with curly hair and whiskers, a top-hat in his hand, in a wide frock-coat, and trousers no less wide, which made his feet look tiny. Here the head and shoulders of a sadly beautiful lady; a freakish hat set over a high chignon, a close-fitting flowered silk dress encircling her breast and slim waist, and with long ear-rings. . . . And here, a young man of the 'seventies: high collar set wide apart and exposing the Adam's apple, the soft oval of the face barely touched with down, a youthful languor in the large enigmatic eyes, the long wavy hair. . . . A fairy tale, a legend—all those faces, their lives and epochs!

I feel just the same thing now, as I resuscitate my own image as once I was. Was I really thus? There was the youthful William the Second, there was a general called Boulanger, there was Alexander the Third, the ponderous ruler of unfathomable Russia. . . . And there was, in those legendary times, in that vanished Russia, Spring, May and somebody, with dark colour in his cheeks, with bright blue eyes, who for no earthly reason tormented himself with a play called *Hamlet*, and day and night concealed within himself a yearning for a future where all the loveliness and joy of this world seemed to lie in store for him. . . .



## III

ONE day, in early summer, I met Tonka's sister-in-law in the village. She stopped and said: "And somebody has asked me to remember her to you. . . ."

Back at home, I saddled my Kabardinka and rode off at random. I remember passing through Znamenskoe, through Malinovoe, going as far as the high road to Livny. . . . One of those serene early summer evenings was beginning, when the fields are full of a special richness of peace, beauty, and well-being. I paused by the roadside, wondering where else I should go, crossed it, and rode on across the fields. I rode towards the glow of the already dipping sun, across some fallow land—it was, I remember, a veritable sea of something bright-yellow in flower—and I reached a large wood which began in a long dale with overgrown ravines and pits where flowers and grass, already cool and smelling towards evening of wood and meadow freshness, reached to the horse's belly. . . . All round, in every bush and copse, the nightingales sang and warbled sweetly; somewhere far off a cuckoo was ceaselessly calling, monotonous and persistent, as though convinced, amid all these vain nightingales' transports, of the sole rightness of its lonely, homeless sorrow, and its resonantly hollow voice seemed to be now near, now far, sadly and marvellously alternating with even more

distant echoes of the evening woodlands. I rode on listening and then began instinctively counting how many more years of life it would foretell me—how much was still left for me of all this inconceivable thing called life—partings, losses, memories, hopes. . . . And the cuckoo went on calling, prophesying for me an infinity of days. But what lay hidden behind that infinity? In the mystery and heedlessness of the surroundings there was something quite terrifying. I looked at Kabardinka's neck, at her mane thrown on one side and swinging rhythmically with the motion, at the whole of that uplifted head which once upon a time, in fairy days, would sometimes speak out in a prophetic voice; terrifying was its speechlessness, that silence never to be broken, the dumbness of a creature so near and so akin to me, living, sensible, feeling, thinking; and still more terrifying—the fantastic possibility of it suddenly breaking that silence. . . . And with senseless, uncanny joy the nightingales sang, and with a magic perseverance the cuckoo went on calling in the distance, yearning continuously for some secret nest. . . .

#### IV

IN summer I went to town to a fair, and there I ran across Balavin again. He was walking with a horse-dealer. The latter was exceedingly dirty and shabby, while Balavin looked particularly neat and elegant—all his clothes were brand-new; he

had a new straw hat and a glossy cane. The horse-dealer, walking hurriedly by his side, was fiercely swearing something, every now and then glancing up savagely and inquisitively at Balavin—he walked on without listening, staring in front of him, cold and hard, with his light green eyes. “All rubbish!” he dropped at last, carelessly, and greeting me as if we had met yesterday, instead of two years ago, he took me by the arm and offered to go somewhere “to have tea and a bit of talk”. We went to one of the tea-rooms at the fair, and he began questioning me with a grin—“Well, how are you? What progress are you making?” and then to talk about the “distressing plight” of our affairs—somehow he knew them better than we did—and again about what I myself was to do. When I took leave of him I felt too dejected, and decided to go home at once. It was already drawing towards evening; the bells in the monastery rang for vespers; the fair, situated on a vast common next to it, was dispersing; the cows, led away behind the creaking carts, making for the high road, bellowed menacingly, choking; the cabs, returning empty, bumping into the dusty pits of the common, swept recklessly past. . . . I boarded the first that came my way and drove to the station—I had just time to catch the evening train in our direction. “Yes, what is to be done?” I thought recalling Balavin’s words and feeling more and more convinced that their meaning was actually hopeless. “I can’t even

imagine what is to be done in your case," he had told me. "Your fathers in similar circumstances used to go off to the Caucasus to serve in the Army, or got attached to various Foreign Office departments, and where can *you* go or get attached to? I don't think you are capable of doing any work at all—you're made of different stuff. You spread yourself too far away, as the books of oracles put it. As regards Baturino I can see only one way out: sell it as quickly as possible, before it has been hammered away. In that case something at least, however trifling, will come to stay in your father's pocket. And as for yourself, you ought to think it over. . . . " But what could I imagine? I asked myself. Go and work in his grain-store?

The effect of that meeting was rather to cool the ardour of my work on *Hamlet*. I had begun translating it accidentally—it was by no means a play congenial to me. It simply chanced to fall under my eyes—just at the time when I so longed to start a clean and laborious life. I immediately took to work, and was soon carried away by it, began to enjoy it, to find a fresh stimulus in its very hardship. Besides, I conceived at the time a childish notion of becoming a translator in general of creating for myself an eventual source, not only of constant artistic delight, but of livelihood too. Now, back at home, I suddenly realized all the vanity of such hopes. I also understood that days went by and all my "dreams" which Balavin, without

himself wishing it, had once more roused in me, were still but dreams. About our "distressing plight" I soon forgot; but "dreams" were another matter. . . . What actually did they consist of? Balavin chanced to mention, for example, the Caucasus—"Your fathers in such circumstances used to go off to the Caucasus"—and once more I thought that I would give half of my life to be in their place. . . . At the fair a young gipsy woman had told my fortune. How little novelty these gipsies have! And yet what feelings I had as she grasped my hand in her black fingers, and how much I thought about her afterwards! She looked, of course, very motley in her bright red and yellow rags, and all the time she faintly swung her hips, telling me the usual silly stuff, throwing away the kerchief from her small jet-black head and tormenting me not only by her hips, by the dreamy sweetness of her lips and eyes, but also by her antiquity, redolent of distant lands, as well as by the fact that here too my "fathers" came in—was there a single one who had not had his fortune told by a gipsy?—the secret bond uniting me to them, the longing to feel it, for how could we really love the world as we do if it had been quite new to us?

## V

IN those days I would often pause and, with the brusque surprise of youth, ask myself: "After all,

what is my life in that vast, incomprehensible, timeless world surrounding me, thrown into the boundlessness of past and future, and at the same time enclosed in a place called Baturino, within the limits of space and time allotted to me personally?" And I saw that life (my life or any other) was a succession of days and nights, of toil and rest, of meetings and talks, of pleasures and nuisances, sometimes called events; that it was a confused accumulation of impressions, pictures and images, of which only the most insignificant part (and even that Heaven knows why and how) remained with us; that it was a ceaseless flow, never stopping for one moment, of incoherent feelings and thoughts, of confused recollections of the past and vague anticipations of the future; and withal, something which seemed to contain a certain kernel, a certain meaning and purpose, something extremely important which it is quite impossible to grasp and put into words, and, connected therewith, an everlasting anticipation: anticipation not merely of happiness, of its peculiar fulness, but also of something else in which, once it came, that essence, that meaning, would at last suddenly reveal itself and be grasped. "You spread yourself too far away, as the oracle-books put it. . . ." And indeed, secretly, I did so spread myself. What for? Perhaps, just in order to grasp that meaning?

## VI

THE departure of my brother George ended our comparative well-being.

He went again to Kharkov—this time quite free, in good spirits; and again, as once, ages ago, when he was being taken to prison, on a clear October day, I saw him off at the station. We drove fast along the well-trodden glistening roads, our brisk talk about the future dispelling the sadness of the parting, that secret sorrow about a completed chapter of life which any parting sums up and therefore ends for ever. "Everything, please God, will be all right," my brother said, selfishly loath as he was to distress himself and drive away his hopes about Kharkov life. "As soon as I see my way and can save some money, I'll send for you. And then we'll see what is to be done, and how. . . . Want a cigarette?" he added, and was delighted to watch me light it clumsily for the first time in my life.

There was something particularly sad and odd in returning home alone. Somehow one would not even believe that what we had secretly feared so long, had now happened, that my brother was gone, that I was returning alone and would wake up alone in Baturino next day. Back at home, a still greater blow lay in store for me. I was driving home in icy purple dusk. As off-horse we had Kabardinka who all the way from the station gave no respite to the shaft-horse, running at a fast trot.

On arriving I forgot to attend to her, and she was given a drink without being taken out; still drenched in sweat, she caught a deadly cold, stood the whole night through without a cloth on, and died towards the morning. At noon I went to the meadows behind the garden, where her body had been removed. O, how cruel and clear was the emptiness in the world, what sepulchral sunlit silence, what transparence of the air and the cold, gleaming, barren fields! Kabardinka's dead carcass lay hideously black in the meadows, showing its high swollen flank and a slim long neck with head thrown far back. The dogs were already working away at her belly, tossing it about, tearing at it voluptuously; a mourning-hued swarm of old ravens loitered about expectantly, at times flashing fiercely up, whenever the dogs, who growled anxiously even in the very midst of their hideous occupation, would suddenly fling their scowling and bloody muzzles on them. . . . And after luncheon, as I lay dully on the sofa in my room, the autumn sky showing uniformly blue behind its minute square window-panes, and black the bare trees, I heard some quick and heavy footsteps in the passage, and my father suddenly came in. He was holding his favourite Belgian double-barrelled gun, the only treasure left him of the former luxury.

"There," he said, putting it resolutely beside me. ' You're welcome to all I have. Perhaps it will bring you some comfort. . . . '



I jumped up, grasped his hand, but had no time to kiss it—he snatched it away and bending rapidly gave me a quick and awkward kiss on the temple.

“And in general don’t distress yourself over-much,” he added, trying to speak with his usual briskness; “I don’t mean, of course, the horse, but your position in general. . . . Do you imagine that I see nothing, that I don’t think about you? More than anyone! I feel guilty towards you all; I ruined you all; but the others have at least got something. Nicholas has at least some means, George has his education, and what have you got, except your beautiful soul? Besides, what does it matter to them? Nicholas is quite an average man, George will remain an eternal student, and you. . . . And what is worse you won’t stay long with us, and what lies in store for you, God alone knows! Yet, remember my saying: ‘There is nothing worse than sadness. . . .’ ”

## VII

It was empty and quiet that autumn in our house. Never before did I seem to feel such affection for my father and mother, but it was only my sister Olya who saved me in those days from the sense of loneliness which had seized upon me with peculiar force. It was with her that I now began to share my walks, to carry on talks, to dream of the future, and it gave me pleasure and joy to find

out, and to become more and more convinced, that she was much more grown up, riper both in soul and in mind, and much closer to me, than I could have expected. There was also in that new relationship between us, a wonderful return to our remote, childish intimacy. . . .

Father had said about me: "What lies in store for you, God alone knows." And what lay in store for her, with all the charm of her youth and all her poverty and loneliness in Baturino?

It was nevertheless mostly about myself that I thought at the time.

## VIII

I GAVE up working, and spent a lot of time in the village, at the cottages, went out shooting a good deal, sometimes with Nicholas, sometimes alone. We no longer had any greyhounds; only a couple of harriers were left to us. Great hunts, still preserved here and there in the district, would hunt down wolves and foxes, and go on distant and prolonged outings to outlying fields, to parts more profitable than ours. And we were glad even when we chanced upon one single hare—or rather we were glad to wander about, chasing the beasts across the autumn fields, in the autumn air.

Thus I was wandering one day, late in November, in the neighbourhood of Efremov. Early in the morning I had breakfasted in the servants' quarters

on some hot potatoes, thrown the gun over my shoulder, mounted an old working gelding, called the dogs and set off. My brother was busy winnowing, so I went alone. It was an exceptionally warm, sunny day, but the fields looked sad, and, as far as sport went, quite hopeless; sad because everything was so quiet and so bare, and everything had that look of utter poverty and humbleness which is proper to the late autumn; and hopeless because of the recent rains; the ground was so muddy and sloppy, and not only the roads, but also the first winter crops, the first tillage and reaped fields, that the dogs and myself had to make our way along the boundary-lines. Quite soon I even stopped thinking of game, and the dogs did likewise—they ran quietly ahead, fully aware of the impossibility of sport in such a field, had there even been anything to go after, and only getting a little livelier whenever we reached some bare copse with a strong damp smell of rotting leaves, or crossed the reddish oak undergrowth, a ravine, a hillock. But there was nothing there either; everywhere was emptiness, stillness, a fluid, lifeless gleam, though clear and warm, amid which the clear countryside stretched away, autumnally bare, flat and neatly outlined—all those checkered plots of fields with alternating stubble, winter crops, and tillage, the russet hides of undergrowth, the islands of birches and aspens, showing grey-blue here and there in the distance. . . .

It was from Lobanovo that I at last turned homewards. I passed through Shipovo, then came to that very Kryptovka where the family manor of the Lermontovs used to be. Here I took a little rest with a peasant I knew, sitting with him on the porch, drinking rye-beer. Before us lay the common, behind it a small manor, long uninhabited, its aspect slightly improved by the garden raising its still black tree-tops in the pale-blue sky, behind a poky old house. As I sat down I gazed and thought, as I always did whenever I happened to come to Kryptovka: was it really true that here, to this very house, Lermontov used to come as a child, and that his father had spent nearly all his life here?

"They say it's going to be sold," said the peasant, also looking at the manor and screwing up his eyes. "They say Kamenev, from Efremov, is haggling over it. . . ."

And glancing at me he screwed up his eyes still more.

"What about you? You aren't selling yet?"

"That's my father's business," I replied evasively.

"Of course, of course," he said, obviously thinking thoughts of his own. "I only meant to say that everybody was selling nowadays, bad days have come to the gentry. The people got spoilt; even their own work they do helter-skelter, not to speak of the gentry's; and the price of labour in

the busy season is extravagant, and the squire has no money to pay wages in advance—hardship, poverty. . . .”

I went on by a roundabout way, deciding, for fun, to pass through Vasilievskoe, to spend the night with the Pisarevs. And on my way I thought with particular intentness of the great poverty of our country-side in general. Everything round me was poor, scant and desolate. I rode along the highroad—marvelling at its desolation and barrenness. I rode along the cart-tracks, going through some hamlets, and past some manors; what cottages, what manor-houses, and what a miserable, meaningless life within them! Not a soul, either in the fields, or on the muddy roads, or in the equally muddy village streets and deserted manor courtyards. One even wondered where all the people had gone, and how they whiled away their autumn boredom and idleness, shut up within those cottages and manor-houses. And then once more I remembered the meaninglessness of my own life too, amid all this, and felt simply horrified at it, suddenly recalling Lermontov at the same time. Yes, here was Kryptovka, that forsaken house, which I could never behold without some infinitely sad and inexplicable emotions. . . . Here was his poor cradle, *our* common cradle; here he had spent his early days, when his child-soul pined, “with wondrous yearning filled”, just as vaguely as mine once; here he wrote his first poems, as inadequate as

mine. . . . And what came afterwards? Afterwards, all of a sudden: *The Demon; Mtsyri; Taman; The oak leaf was severed from its native bough.* . . .

"Where is the link between this Kroptovka and all what Lermontov stands for? What is Lermontov?" I thought—and I saw first the two volumes of his works, so intimately familiar to me from my childhood, which had so long been a part of my life; I saw his odd, youthful face with its staring dark eyes; then I began to see one poem after another, not only their outward shape, but also the scenes connected with them—in fact, I saw what I fancied to be Lermontov's earthly life: the snowy summit of Kazbek; the Daryal ravine; that clear valley of Georgia, unfamiliar to me, where the streams of Aragva and Kura murmur "clasped like two sisters"; the cloudy night and the seashore hut in Taman; the vaporous sea blueness in which one can barely distinguish a white sail; the young, bright green plane-tree beside something quite fantastic called the Black Sea. . . . What life, what destiny! Only twenty-seven years, but how infinitely full and beautiful, up to the very last day, to that dark evening on the desolate road at the foot of Mashuk when, as if from a gun, the shot of a man called Martynov was fired from a huge old-fashioned pistol, and Lermontov "dropped dead". . . . All this I felt and imagined with such vividness that my heart was suddenly filled to overflowing with rapture and envy, and I even said aloud to

myself that I had enough of Baturino, that it was high time for me to take some decision.

## IX

NEXT day, at home again, I still thought the same thoughts.

At night I sat in my room, thinking and reading at the same time—re-reading *War and Peace*. The weather had sharply changed overnight. The night was cold and stormy. It was already late; the whole house was still and dark. In my room the stove was lit; it blazed and roared the hotter, the more angry and dismal were the inroads of the wind on the garden, the stronger it shook the windows of the house. I sat reading and thinking about myself, sadly and delightedly aware of that late hour, the night, the stove, and the storm. Then I rose, dressed, went out through the drawing-room, and began pacing the lawn before the house, on its already scant and frosted grass. Around me the stormy garden rose black, and a pale light hung over the lawn. The night was moonlit, but somehow tantalising, Ossianic. The icy northern wind roared intermittently, the tops of the old trees sighed dismally and in unison, the bushes gave out a sharp, dry noise and seemed to run ahead of me; over the sky, daubed with something whitish, over the small lunar patch in a large iridescent halo, some dark weird clouds rushed swiftly from the

north, where everything looked peculiarly sinister and dismal; they even seemed alien to our parts, belonging rather to some seascape the old painters of nocturnal shipwrecks used to paint. And I began to walk up and down, now against the wind, overcoming its icy chilliness, now driven forward by it, and to think again—with the confusion and naivety so characteristic of one's innermost thoughts, especially in youth. This, I suppose, is how my thoughts ran:

"No, I've never read anything as good as this! Yet, what about *The Cossacks*, what about Yeroshka, Maryanka? Or Pushkin's *Journey to Arzrum*? Yes, how happy they had all been—Pushkin, Tolstoy, Lermontov.

"Yesterday, it was said, somebody's hunt rode by along the highroad to the outlying field, together with the hunt of the young Tolstoy. Isn't it wonderful—I am *his* contemporary, and even his neighbour! After all, it is the same as if one were to live at the same time with and next to Pushkin. All this is *his*—these Rostovs, and Pierre, and the field of Austerlitz, and the dying Prince Andrey: 'There is nothing in life, except the nothingness of all that I understand, and the greatness of something I don't understand, but which matters most . . .' Someone told Pierre in his dream: 'Life means love. . . . To love life means to love God . . .' This is just what someone keeps on telling me; and how I love everything, even this



wild night! Yet why am I so miserable? I should like to see and love the whole world, the whole earth, all the Natashas and Maryankas. I must at all costs get away from here."

In the ring round the milky, misty moon there was a kind of sinister, celestial omen. Its miserable, slightly tilted face, was becoming sadder and mistier against the pale dimness of the sky; high up rushed smoky, leaden, even black clouds, mournfully veiling that face; from the north, from beyond the roaring garden, a black stormy cloud was rising, and the wind blew up the smell of snow. And I walked on and thought:

"No, one can't go on living like this. I couldn't even if I had ten unmortgaged Baturinos. Take these young Tolstoys: how happy they must be carousing at present, benighted somewhere in a forest hut! And how estranged from them I should have been had I fallen in their company! Isn't it terrible that Tolstoy himself, in his youth, dreamed chiefly of marriage, of family life, of running his estate! And now there is nothing, but that talk of 'working for the good of the people', of 'repaying one's debt to the people'. . . . But I don't feel, nor ever did, as if I owed anything to the people. I cannot, nor do I wish to, sacrifice myself for the people's sake, or 'serve' it, or play, as my father puts it, at parties and problems at the county assemblies. . . . No, I must at last take some decision!"

Thus I walked and thought for a long time, looking in vain for some decision to take, and returning indoors utterly bewildered with chaotic and fruitless thoughts. The stove had meanwhile gone out, and the lamp had burnt out, reeking of oil and glimmering so faintly that in the room one could perceive the uncertain light of that pale and disquieting night. I sat for a while at the desk, then took my pen and suddenly began writing a letter to my brother George, saying that I proposed to leave shortly for Orel in order to look for some job on the staff of *The Voice*. . . .

## X

THAT letter decided my fate.

Of course I did not leave "shortly"—first it was necessary to save up some money for the journey—but nevertheless I went at last.

I recall my last lunch at home. ~I remember that as soon as it was over we heard a dull tinkle of the bells under the windows, and behind them, quite close to them, there arose a pair of shaggy, wintry, rustic horses—shaggy also because of the snow that was falling ceaselessly that day in thick, milky flakes. Heavens, how old it all is, all such departures, and how tantalisingly new it was to me! Even the snow that fell that day seemed to me quite peculiar—so struck was I by its whiteness and coolness at the moment when, wearing, over a fur-

lined coat, my father's heavy raccoon pelisse, and escorted by the whole household, I went out to take my seat in the sleigh.

What happened next was like a dream—the long, silent drive, the steady roll of the sleigh in that endless white realm of snowflakes where there was neither earth nor sky, but only something white, streaming ceaselessly down, and delicious winter road smells of horse, of a wet raccoon collar, of sulphur matches and cheap tobacco when a cigarette was lit. . . . And then, in that whiteness there flashed the first telegraph pole, the wooden shields came into sight covered with snow, sticking out of snowdrifts by the roadside—the beginnings of some new life, no longer of the steppes, that something called “railway” which for a Russian has always a peculiar and troubling appeal. . . .

When the train came in and I had said good-bye to the farmhand, given him the pelisse, and asked to remember me to everybody in Baturino, I entered a crowded third-class carriage, feeling as if I were setting out on a journey that was never to end. For a long time I even wondered at the indifference with which some of the passengers drank tea or ate, others slept, and still others, with nothing else to do, kept throwing logs into the iron stove, which was already red-hot and breathing its flames all over the carriage. I rejoiced as I sat there in that dry, metallic heat, in its smell of birch-wood and pig-iron, whilst behind the window the

grey-blue snow kept on falling and falling, and all the time darkness was closing in. . . .

## XI

WHAT followed was something very strange: my forebodings had been right—ahead of me there lay indeed a long and uncommon journey, whole years of wandering, of homelessness, of reckless and unruly existence, sometimes completely happy, sometimes utterly miserable—in a word just what apparently suited me, and was perhaps only outwardly so fruitless and without meaning.

## XII

THAT wintry snowy day was to see the end of my childhood, of my boyhood, of my early youth—of everything that had gone to make my life what it was ever since my birth, and had seemed to be only a prolonged preparation for something really important which can be properly called life, the walk of life; and on that very day began this walk—and very strange it was, I repeat

The vague thoughts with which I then set out were full of profound sadness and of fondness for everything from which I had just parted, all that I had so pitilessly abandoned to silence and solitude in Baturino; I felt even my absence from there, and could see my deserted room which, in its almost

pious stillness, seemed to retain something that was completed for ever—my former self. But of course that sadness held also a great and secret joy, the happy awareness of the dream at last being somehow realized, of freedom, activity, movement (towards something the more alluring for its very vagueness). And these last feelings naturally heightened with each new station we passed, so that the preceding ones became ever fainter, until at last all my past, all I had left behind me, retreated into the distance, as something dear but by now almost strange, and there remained only the present, which was gradually becoming more interesting and distinct: already I was becoming partly used to the multitude of those strange, coarse lives and faces around me; I began somehow to discriminate among them, and, alongside of my own personal feelings, to live by my feelings towards them, to build up various conjectures about them, to distinguish different sorts of cheap tobacco, to differentiate the bundle on the knees of a peasant woman from the sham oak box on which a recruit opposite me was propping his elbow. I noticed already that the carriage was fairly new and clean, with the yellow fluted planks of its walls warmed by an iron stove, and very stuffy because of those various tobacco smokes, on the whole rather pungent, even though giving one a pleasant homely sense of human life that somehow or other had barricaded itself off from the snowy plains outside the window, where tele-

graph wires rise and fall as they flow endlessly past. And here, I already want to get out, to snow and wind, and unsteadily I walk towards the door. . . . The snowy cold coming from the fields blows into the platform of the carriage, all round me spreads the whiteness of fields now quite unfamiliar. The snow at last begins to fall more sparsely; it has grown brighter and still whiter around, whilst the train approaches somewhere and stops for a few moments: a desolate little station, stillness—only the engine ahead wheezes hotly—and everything is full of incomprehensible loveliness: that temporary torpor and silence, the wheezing expectancy of the engine, and even, it seems, the fact that the station itself is invisible behind a red wall of goods trucks standing on the nearest track, on thawed rails between which a hen is walking, calm and homely, now and then pecking at something, somehow or other doomed to spend all her hen's life quietly at that very station and not caring in the least whither and why you are voyaging with all your dreams and sensations which, in their everlasting and lofty joy, are linked up with things outwardly so paltry and commonplace. . . .

As the evening drew closer all my feelings were fused into one—the expectation of the first big station. Long before it came I was again freezing on the carriage platform until at last I saw ahead, in the inhospitable twilight, many multicoloured lights, rails going in all directions, signal-boxes,

railway points, spare engines, and then the station itself with its platform black with crowds, and brightly lit inside with lamps. . . . One can easily imagine my railroad haste as I dashed to the bright and odorous buffet together with many others, for once their equal, and began burning my mouth with cabbage soup such as I had never tasted before.

All this ended rather unexpectedly—at least in appearance: as I sat after dinner contentedly smoking a cigarette by the dark window of the carriage, now rattling on again, in the smoky half-light of a thick candle supplied by the State and burning in a lantern in the corner, I reflected that here I was, strange though it may seem, nearing my destination, that same Orel which I could hardly imagine as yet, but which was wonderful for the mere reason that there, past its station, ran the great highway across the whole map of Russia: northwards—to Moscow and beyond, southwards—to Kursk and Kharkov and, what was more, to Sevastopol itself, where my father's youth seemed to dwell for ever. . . . And suddenly I found myself asking whether it was really true that I was going to join a paper called *The Voice* to take up a job. In this, too, of course, there was something that attracted one terribly—something called editorial offices and printer's shops. But Kursk, Kharkov Sevastopol. . . . "No, this is all nonsense," I suddenly said to myself. "I will merely stop in Orel,

get to know those people, see what they can offer me, tell them I must think it over and see my brother.' Stop there—and then on to Kharkov, seeing that I have been provided with enough money. . . ."

But as it turned out I had no need even to stop at Orel. Everything turned out even better than I expected: it happened that our train was late at Orel, just in time for the down-train to Kharkov. And this other train happened to be a wonderful one, such as I had never seen before—a fast one, with an alarming American engine, and composed of large, heavy, first-class carriages with cashmere blinds on the windows, with lights showing faintly through the blue silk, with all the warmth and cosiness of wealthy life, and to spend a night in that (and southward bound too) seemed to me the very acme of bliss. . . .

### XIII

IN Kharkov I tumbled at once into a world quite new to me.

One of my characteristics had always been a peculiar sensitiveness to light and air, and to the slightest variations in them. And the first thing that struck me in Kharkov was the mildness of its air, and that it seemed to be a little lighter than in our parts. I came out of the station, took a sleigh—the cabmen turned out to be driving here with



pairs, with big bells—looked round me, and instantly felt that things were not quite as with us; it all seemed softer and lighter, even springlike. Here too, it was snowy and white, but the whiteness was somehow different, pleasantly dazzling. There was no sun, but plenty of light, more in any case than one would expect in December, and its warm presence behind the clouds held out a promise of something very agreeable. And everything seemed softer in that light and air: the smell of coal from behind the station, the faces and the conversation of the cabmen, the jingling of the bells on horses harnessed in pairs, the gentle touting of the women-folk selling round cracknels and seeds, grey bread and lard, in the station square. And beyond the square stood a row of exceedingly tall poplars, bare, but also looking truly Southern, Little Russian. And in the town there was a thaw in the streets. . . .

Yet this was all as nothing compared to what lay in store for me later in the day! I had never before experienced so many new sensations, never in my life made so many new acquaintances. It sometimes happens that on the very first day after arriving somewhere one experiences a singular wealth of impressions and encounters. So it was with me on that day.

In my brother, who received me with glad surprise, there also proved to be something new—here in Kharkov he seemed different from what

he used to be in Baturino—younger, nicer, though apparently less near me despite all the joy of our meeting. Besides, how strange his Kharkov life was! Granted that, as my father put it, he was an "eternal student," but after all, he was an Arseniev. And where did I find him? In a steep narrow street, in a dirty stony courtyard reeking of coal and Jewish kitchens, in the poky, overcrowded flat of a tailor named Blumkin. True, even this was all deliciously new to me, yet I was taken aback.

"Well, isn't it splendid that you've come on a Sunday and caught me here!" he said, after kissing me. "Though why did you come really?" he added, at once, trying to speak in that tone of raillery so usual in our family, and laughing with his eyes.

And, laughing involuntarily myself—feeling pleased with our meeting and somehow pleasantly uneasy—I replied that I did not know myself why I came . . . certainly in order to consult him at last seriously as to what I was to do with myself. But he was no longer listening. "We'll think it over somehow!" he said with assurance, and instantly began to hurry me on to wash and tidy myself, in order to go out with him to dinner to a small restaurant kept by a Pole called Lisovsky, where many of his fellow-workers from the Zemstvo Statistical Bureau used to have meals. And so we went out and walked through one street after

another, still talking at random, in the haphazard way one does at such times, while my eyes—I was already dressed in town fashion, and very much aware of it—strayed over those streets, which seemed to me quite gorgeous, and over the surroundings; the sun came out in the afternoon, the snow glittered and thawed, the poplars in the Sumskaya Street raised their tops towards the puffy white clouds sailing in the moist blue sky which seemed to be slightly steaming. . . .

Lisovsky's restaurant turned out to be a curious basement establishment, a bar with excellent and surprisingly cheap hors-d'oeuvres—especially nice were the little pancake patties, burning hot and strongly peppered, four for a penny—and a crowd of dining officials whose simple ways, so characteristic of Little Russia, greatly impressed me. As soon as we sat down at a large separate table, some people approached and joined us, looking distinctly strange to me. I gazed at them the more eagerly as they were just those people (apparently set quite apart from the rest of the world) about whom I had heard so much from my brother when still in Baturino. To everyone of them he introduced me for some reason with cheerful haste and even, it seemed, with pride.

"He's just arrived, imagine!" he would say, laughing at something.

And soon my head turned giddy: because of that company of people, quite unusual to me, and so

remarkable; and because of that crowded\* basement, through the windows of which the sunlight came springlike and gay from above, and all sorts of legs could be seen passing to and fro along the street; and because of the scalding *borsch*; and because the conversation at our table centred all the time around subjects strange to me, yet apparently exceedingly interesting—round the famous statistician Annensky, whose name was pronounced with invariable admiration; some governor on the Volga who was said to flog the starving peasants to check their spreading rumours of famine; the coming Pirogov Congress in Moscow which, as usual, was to be a real event; and round the manner in which one had to “react” to yesterday’s prank—“or rather denunciation”—of the chairman of the Provincial Zemstvo assembly who said that “the Kharkov Zemstvo Statistical Bureau had long ago become notorious all over Russia for its seditious spirit. . . .” I can easily imagine how strikingly I stood out at that dinner-party with my youth, freshness, rustic sunburn, health, simplicity, the ardent and eager attentiveness of my ears and eyes, which probably even looked like dull stupidity. My brother, too, was cast in quite a different mould. He also seemed to belong to quite a different world from the rest of them, in spite of his nearness to them; and he seemed younger, and somehow more naïve, than any of them; he looked more distinguished, and even his conversation was different.

Many among that company, as I was to realize in later years, were quite typical both in their outward appearance and in everything else. Of some of them I already secretly disapproved in some respects: one, very tall and narrow-chested, was too short-sighted and stooped too much; he never took his hand out of his trouser-pocket, and all the time made slight vibrating movements with one leg over which his other leg was somehow miraculously screwed round; another, yellow-haired, with a transparently yellow and lean face, seemed to me to talk too much, with too great ardour and inspiration, while he would flick off his cigarette-ash without looking at it, using the forefinger of the hand in which he held it; his neighbour would all the time grin caustically at something and do something which annoyed me particularly: with his two fingers he would roll a pellet of white bread over the long-soiled tablecloth. . . . But then there were others who were exceedingly nice: the Pole Hansky with deep and sorrowful eyes and dry lips, who smoked continuously, inhaling the smoke, and repeatedly lighting his already burning cigarette with a trembling hand; the large and picturesquely dishevelled Krasnopolsky, a medical student recently rusticated in his fifth year, who wore spectacles and yet resembled St. John the Baptist; the bearded Leontovich, who was older, and better known as a statistician than any of them, and who instantly

charmed me by his respectability, his kindly calm, his friendly reasonableness, and most of all by the extremely pleasant, purely Little Russian timbre of his deep voice; then a certain Padalka, a small sharp-nosed fellow, likewise spectacled, completely absentminded, fiercely enthusiastic, always passionately resenting something, and at the same time so childishly pure and sincere that I instantly took to him even more than to Leontovich. I also felt a great liking to the statistician Vagin—such a hidebound statistician, as I was to learn afterwards, that apart from statistics nothing seemed to exist for him in the world—a tall, strongly-built fellow with dazzling teeth, handsome and cheerful in the peasant way—he was in fact of peasant extraction—who laughed uproariously and infectiously and spoke with broad northern inflections. . . . And two men roused in me a violent hostility: Bykov, a former workman, a sturdy fellow wearing a blouse, whose curly hair, thick neck and bulging eyes really had something ox-like in them;<sup>1</sup> and another whose name was Melnik—he was scrubby, lean, rickety, of sandy yellow colour, blear-eyed and snuffling, but extremely violent and self-opinionated; many years after, to my complete surprise, he turned out to be a great personage, some kind of “corn dictator.” . . .

<sup>1</sup> In Russian the name Bykov comes from the word “*byk*” meaning ox [Trans]

## XIV

It was among such people that I spent my first Kharkov winter (as also many years afterwards).

It is a matter of general knowledge what that class of people was like, how it evolved, what were its life and creed. The most remarkable thing was that those who belonged to it, after passing, when still on the school bench, through all that peculiar training which they were supposed to undergo at the outset—I mean, through some kind of “circle,” then through participation in various students’ “movements” and in this or that “work,” and afterwards through exile, prison or penal servitude—and continuing that “work” in one way or another, even afterwards—that they led on the whole a life completely detached from the rest of the Russian nation, refusing even to regard as human beings people of various practical occupations, such as merchants, farmers, doctors, priests, soldiers, and above all policemen and gendarmes, the slightest hobnobbing with whom was regarded as not only disgraceful but even criminal; they had everything for themselves, peculiar and impregnable: their own affairs, interests, happenings, celebrities, their own morals, their own rules of family life and friendship, and their own attitude towards Russia: the negation of her past and present and the dream of her future, the belief in that future for which they were in

fact to "fight". There were, of course, among that set, people very different not only in the degree of their revolutionary creeds, of their "love" for the people and their hatred of its "enemies," but also in the whole of their outward and inward appearance. In general, however, they were all rather narrow-minded, downright, intolerant, and their professed creed was rather simple: only we, and all sorts of "humiliated and insulted" people, are human beings; all the evil is on the Right, all the good on the Left; all bright things are in the people, in its "mainstays and aspirations", all the disasters, in the form of government and in the bad rulers (who were even regarded as a sort of a tribe apart); all salvation, in an upheaval, in Constitution or Republic. . . .

Such was then the set to which I was introduced in Kharkov, where I found a rather true and complete model of it. On coming to Kharkov I joined it at once, and this not merely outwardly, though indeed, it suited me very little!

What other set could I have joined? I was full of eager curiosity for everything and everybody. In Kharkov I was already surrounded by a vast and complex life. And I looked at everything with wide-open eyes, secretly wishing to be admitted into all its circles. But how was I to be introduced to them? There was no connecting link between them and myself, and I did not seek it: the desire to penetrate them was already overshadowed by



my conscious sense that, though much in my new surroundings did not suit me, there would be many things in other sets that would suit me still less—for really what had I in common with merchants or officials? There was in my new environment a good deal that was just pleasant to me. The range of my acquaintances grew quickly, and I liked the ease with which this could be done. I liked the student-like modesty of life, the simplicity of ways, of mutual relations in that atmosphere. I liked some individuals very much—especially their outward appearance, which was always decisive with me. Besides, life in that set was rather cheerful. In the morning—a gathering at the office, where there was a good deal of tea-drinking, smoking and debating; then, a lively meal, for nearly all were in the habit of lunching in parties at small restaurants; in the evening—a fresh gathering, at a meeting, a soirée, or a private party. . . . That winter we used to go most often to Hanksy, who was rather well-off; then to Madame Shklyarevich, a rich and beautiful widow, where famous Little Russian actors used quite often to come to sing songs about the “free Cossacks” and even their own *Marseillaise*; or to the hospitable house of an important railway official, a man magnificent in every way, a well-fed handsome fellow of Oriental type, aged forty, carnal, gifted, and endowed with a caustic and rather scornful wit, despising everything and everybody,

disbelieving everything except the absolute necessity of sweeping off the earth's face all the rules and customs prevailing in Russia, and plying us with Chambertin and cigars. . . .

Of uncongenial things in that set there were plenty, too. As I got used to it and began to see better, I came more and more to resent now one thing now another, and at times could not even hide my resentment, starting a heated and of course vain discussion on some subject, since the majority of these people took a fancy to me and forgave my resentments. I was aware of becoming permeated with a wholesale bias against all other classes of society; yet what did I find in mine? Here girls and boys were given to read books on Political Economy, while their parents themselves read only Korolenko or Zlatovratsky, despising Chekhov, for instance, because of his political indifference, blaming Tolstoy in a most violent way for his "most disgraceful and harmful propaganda of inactivity", for his "fussing about God like a child about its new toy", for sitting down to a "luxurious" table, after playing at farmer or cobbler, whilst those peasants of Yasnaya Polyana whom he pretended to love so dearly were "bloated with hunger"; the way they spoke of literature in general was such that, despite my resentment, I would gradually yield to a secret fear, thinking that perhaps such-and-such a work really ought not to have been written, or such other was unwanted

by anybody, whereas certain others (about some poor fellow called Makar or the life of the exiles) were just what was needed; they always urged that one should be prepared for anything for Russia's good, yet strongly suspected all classes in Russia except the poorest and the most illiterate; the epoch of the *Fatherland's Annals* was regarded by them as the Golden Age, and its suppression as one of the greatest and most terrible events in Russian life; and their own time they called "a time of muddle"—"there have been worse times, but never baser"—pretending that all Russia "suffocated" during it; they denounced as "renegade" any one who would conceive the slightest doubt as to certain rules laid down by them, and invariably scoffed at somebody's "moderation and punctiliousness"; they sincerely admired, for instance, Vagin's wife for her organising of Sunday lectures illustrated by lantern-slides, and for herself preparing some such lecture—"On Volcanoes"; at parties, even the bearded fellows would sing about "hostile storms blowing over our heads"—and I felt so acutely the falsity of these "storms," the insincerity of emotions and thoughts ready-made for life, and the sentimentality, unbecoming to their age, that I did not know where to look and was asked:

"And you, Alesha,—are you pouting your poet's lips again? What do you resent now?"

It was the wife of Bogdanov who asked me this, that same statistician who could twist up his legs

in such an amazing way. The Bogdanovs were having a party; their small flat was crowded and filled with tobacco smoke; the samovar was never off the table, and corners were full of empty beer bottles. The gathering was in honour of a famous old "fighter" arrived incognito in Kharkov, famed for his widespread and indefatigable work, who had on countless occasions served terms of imprisonment in fortresses, had several times been beyond the polar circle and had escaped from everywhere, a man looking like a troglodyte, shaggy and clumsy, with hair in his nostrils and ears; but his small eyes looked extremely clever and penetrating, and his conversation flowed volubly. Bogdanov himself was a nonentity, but his wife enjoyed a long and well-earned notoriety; she had met in the course of her life all kinds of celebrities and taken part in all kinds of undertakings. In the old days, she had been rather pretty, and had plenty of admirers; she was still merry and pert, sharp-tongued and quick-witted, and could turn the tables on anyone and display uncommon logical gifts; she was slim and youthful, and dressed for parties—the only thing that spoiled her were her eyeglasses, which caught the skin on the bridge of her nose. She liked me, but took every occasion to scold me. At the moment I looked "pouting," because a group of people in a corner, having had their fill of the celebrity, of talking and drinking, were already singing: "We'll curse all the villains,

we'll call all the fighters to battle." I felt pained, uneasy, and my hostess, sitting next to me on the sofa, with a fine cigarette in her fingers, noticed this and was a little cross. I did not know how to answer her, and felt incapable of expressing my feelings, while she, without waiting for me to answer, started declaiming Nekrasov in her sonorous voice: "From those who rejoice, who prattle idly, who stain their hands in gore. . . ." This seemed to me simply stupid—after all, I reflected, who *were* the people who thus rejoiced, prattled and stained their hands! And then came something which I loathed still more for its student-like bravado: "From a far-off, far-off land, from the wide mother-Volga, for the sake of glorious labour, for the sake of merry freedom, have we gathered hither . . ." I even turned away from that "mother Volga" and "glorious labour," and noticed how Brailovskaya, a charming girl, silent and passionate, with the ardent and quizzical eyes of an archangel, looked at me from her corner with a challenging directness of hatred. . . .

On the whole my sympathies were no more with the political Right than theirs, that is, so far as my giddy-headed revolutionary sympathies were concerned, my sincere craving for goodness, humane-ness, justice, but I simply could not bear to be reminded, even jokingly (and yet, of course, edifyingly): "A poet you need not be, but a citizen you must be!"—when that "*mustness*" was imposed

on me, when I was being instructed, even indirectly, allegorically, that the whole meaning of life lies "in work for the good of the community," in other words, for the peasants or workers. I felt beside myself. What! Must I sacrifice myself for the sake of some everlastingly drunken locksmith, or a horseless Klim, and not a live Klim but a collective one whom they really did not even want to know, whom in actual life they noticed as little as any cabman passing them in the street, while I had been truly fond of, and still was wholeheartedly of some of my Baturino Klims, and was ready to give my last penny to an ambulant sawyer timidly and awkwardly wandering about the town with a bag and a saw over his back, and shyly asking me, a penniless youth, the naive and touchingly silly question: "Haven't you some work for me, young sir?"—yes, not only give a penny, but seize someone by the throat for his sake! It was inconceivable to me how one could really talk of dying tranquilly after having honestly worked for the good of the community: this made my soul revolt, because of the impertinent attitude towards that soul implied in that statement. I actually suffered now from those everlasting quotations from Schedrin about "little Judases," about "Sillytown" and the mayors who enter it riding a white horse; I would grind my teeth whenever I saw, on the walls of nearly every flat I frequented, Chernyshevsky's spectacles and birdlike face, or Belinsky, lean as

death, with enormous terrifying eyes, rising from his deathbed to meet the gendarmes entering his study.

Besides, the Bykovs and the Melniks were in that *milieu*. One look at their faces made it difficult for one to get used to the idea that they, too, were working along towards some beautiful future, and even regarded themselves as among the leading experts and dispensers of good to mankind.

Finally, there was a fellow known as Max, who occasionally appeared in Kharkov: tall, with crooked legs, solid as oak roots, wearing thick Swiss nailed boots, very quiet and businesslike, very careful in his speech, with a tanned, rather rough face and a big pot-like skull roundly and steeply expanding over it. He slept exceedingly little, ate frugally, and was for ever and ever quite tirelessly in the move somewhere. . . .

So the winter passed.

In the morning, while my brother was in his office, I would ramble in town or sit reading in the public library. Then I would again wander about, thinking of the books I had read, of the people walking or driving past, of their probably being nearly all happy and calm in their own way — every one of them engrossed in his or her own work and more or less secure, while I was only vaguely and vainly pining away with a desire to write something which I myself was unable to understand,

something about nothing and everything, something which I had neither the daring to undertake nor the skill to cope with and was all the time putting off. At the same time I was so hard up that I could not even afford to realise my poor secret dream of buying a nice note-book; this was the more bitter as a great deal seemed to depend on that book—my whole life, I felt, would somehow change its course, become livelier and more active—for what only might I not write in that book? Spring was already starting, I had just read Dragomanov's collection of Little Russian songs, and was literally fascinated by the *Tale of the Campaign of Igor*, having chanced to read it for a second time and suddenly realized all its amazing beauty, and here I was again drawn far-off, away from Kharkov—to the Donets sung by the poet of Igor, and thither where the young Princess Euphrosinya seemed still to be standing on the town rampart, watching the same early dawn of the olden days, and to the Black Sea of Cossack times, where some wonderful falcon sat on a white stone, and towards the smooth highways of Poltava, and yet again towards my father's young days, towards Sevastopol. . . .

Thus I would spend my morning, and then go to Lisovsky's canteen, returning to reality, to those table talks and discussions which had already become a habit to me, an everyday-interest. Then my brother and I would rest, chatting and lounging on our beds in our poky room, where after dinner



a particularly thick smell of a Jewish meal, of something warm, odorously alkaline, came through the door. Then we would do a little work—I, too, was sometimes given from the office some calculations and *précis* to do. And then once more we would go out to see people. . . .

Most of all, I remember, I liked going to Hansky's. He was an excellent musician and would sometimes play to us for whole evenings. He opened up to me a strange world, hitherto quite unfamiliar, sweetly and poignantly exalted, a world which I would enter, at the sound of the very first notes, with an enraptured, uncanny delight, to acquire immediately that greatest of all illusions (of the would-be divine possibility of becoming all-blissful, all-powerful, and all-knowing) which only music and some moments of poetic inspiration, can give. And it was strange to see Hansky himself, a man of such extreme revolutionary views—though he aired them less often and with more restraint than any of the others—sitting at the piano, his lips already parched to blackness with that growing, tense and ardent, passion with which he always played. The sounds carried one off somewhere, racing, bar after bar, persistent, refined, fluent, and exultant, and so senselessly divine in their joy as to become almost terrible, and a wonderfully tragic image would arise in my mind: I kept on thinking that the time would come when Hansky would no doubt go mad and then, in his narrow

cell with grated window, his burning lips, his ecstatic eyes, dressed in a grey convict blouse, he would go on living, even without music, in the same senseless and joyful, illusory and exalted world. . . .

Once Hansky told us how he, when still young, had been to Mozart's house in Salzburg, and seen there his old-fashioned narrow clavichord and, beside it, a glass case containing his skull. I thought: "When still young! And I?" And I felt so bitter, so mortified that I could hardly sit in my place, overpowered as I was with a sudden passionate desire to run instantly home and, without losing a moment, set about writing some poem or story, to create something out of the ordinary, to become at once well known, famous, and then go to Salzburg to see with my own eyes that clavichord and that skull. . . .

Many years later I realized that dream which ever since had dwelt secretly in my heart, among so many other old and hidden dreams; I saw Salzburg, and the skull, and the clavichord. The keys were exactly the same colour as the skull, and I longed to bend over and kiss them, to touch them with my lips. And the skull itself was incredibly small, like an infant's. . . .

## XV

EARLY in the spring I went to the Crimea.

I was given a free ticket and had to travel under someone else's name, pretending to be a railwayman. . . . My youth passed in the throes of great privations!

It was then that I first felt the importance of a name in life; all the way I struggled against that alien and offending something which I had to assume along with that railwayman's name. And it was not the only thing I had to overcome. The fact, for instance, that I started in such a crammed and foul carriage of the night-mail train, simply terrifying by its length, such as I had never seen before. It came in already packed, and on the platform at Kharkov it was assailed by a fresh countless horde of people going south in search of work, with all their bags, bundles, bast-shoes and leg-wrappers tied to them, with kettles and stinking provisions: rusty kippers, baked eggs. . . . Besides, the hour was late, so that I had a sleepless night in store, then a long day, and another night without sleep. . . . But I was ready for anything—somewhere far-off my father's youth awaited me.

The vision of that youth had dwelt in my heart ever since my childhood. It was a late summer's day, infinitely remote and bright. There was something sorrowful in that day, but also great happiness. There was something associated with my hazy

notion of the days of the Crimean campaign: some redoubts, some assaults, some soldiers of that peculiar epoch called "age of serfdom", and the death, on the Malakhov Mound, of my uncle Nicholas Sergeevich, a handsome giant of a colonel, a rich and brilliant man, whose memory in our family had always been wrapped in legend. And above all,—there was in that day a desolate and bright seaside hillock, and on that hillock among stones, some white flowers like snowdrops, growing there for the sole reason, of course, that when still a child, one snowy and sunny winter day, I heard my father say: "And in the Crimea we used to pluck flowers at this time of year with nothing but our tunics on!"

And what did I actually find?

I remember that at daybreak after the first night I woke up, squeezed in my corner, at some steppe station, already far from Kharkov. A candle in the corner was burning out; there was as yet no sun, but the early morning was already quite clear and rosy. I gazed in surprise at the painful and hideous picture of people sleeping all over the place in that rosy light, with all their foulness, their chattels scattered all over the place, and instantly I opened the window. And what a dawn that was! A deep stillness everywhere, the far-off Eastern sky aglow with rosy flames, the air full of that ecstatic freshness and clarity which can only be there in early spring, at daybreak, on the steppe;

in the stillness, the larks invisible in the sky sing their fresh, sweet spring song; to right and left our train stretches like a motionless wall, and a couple of yards away a large grave-mound stands facing me in that smooth and boundless steppe like a threshing-ground. Even now I cannot understand what it was that so impressed me. It was unlike anything, both in its outline, so definite and yet so soft, and, what mattered most, in what it concealed. There was here, despite all its simplicity, something really extraordinary; something so ancient that it seemed infinitely alien to all living, modern things, and yet it was so familiar, so close, so intimate.

"Look, that's how people used to be buried long ago!" an old man said to me from a far-off corner. He alone was not asleep and sat bent, breathing hard, puffing hotly at his pipe, his swollen, bleary eyes gleaming from beneath a ragged calf-skin cap, out of all that red, wrinkled something, overgrown with greyish stubble, which was his face. "In olden days people were buried so that their memory should be kept!" he said firmly. "Rich, they were." And after a pause he added: "Or maybe it is the Tartars who buried us so? All sorts of things happen in this world, young sir—bad and good alike. . . ."

And the second dawn was still more wonderful. Again I awoke suddenly at some station—and this time saw something heavenly: a white summer

morning—here it was already quite summer—and something rather close-growing and all blooming, dewy and fragrant, a little white station all entwined with roses, a wooded cliff rising steeply over it, and thick flowering bushes in the ravine on the opposite side. . . . And the engine, before starting, called somehow in quite a different way, joyously and as it were alarmed, sonorously, as they do in the mountains. And when once more it reached the free expanse of the plain, there suddenly looked at me, from behind the wooded hills ahead, with all its vast desert rising skywards, something heavily blue, almost black, watery and misty, still gloomy, just on the point of breaking loose from the dark, moist, nocturnal womb—and I suddenly *recognized* it, with terror and joy. Yes, that's it—remembered, recognized!

As for Sevastopol, it struck me as almost tropical. What a glowing, southern, luxurious station, warmed right through by soft air! How hot and shimmering were the rails in front of it! The sky looked quite pale and grey with heat, but in this, too, was luxury, happiness, the South. All the crowd of rustics whom we had been bringing with us had by now melted away. And here I was, almost alone, at last alighting from the train, my own name once more restored to me, and, staggering with weariness and hunger, I made my way to the first-class waiting room. It was noon; all was deserted; the vast buffet (the world of the rich, free, well-born people

who arrived here by express trains!) looked clean and quiet, gleaming with the whiteness of its tables, the vases and sconces on them. . . . I could no longer restrain myself, miserly as I had been all the way—and ordered coffee and a loaf of white bread. They brought me this, looking at me askance—my appearance was rather suspicious. But never mind—I was once more myself, I delighted in the stillness, the cleanliness, the warm air drifting in through the windows and doors, and suddenly I saw something parti-coloured like a little guinea-hen walk in unexpectedly, but quite simply, entering the waiting-room through the door that stood open to the bright platform. . . . Ever since, the notion of southern stations has been linked up in my mind with that parti-coloured creature.

But where was the thing which had seemed to be the object of my journey? In Sevastopol itself there proved to be no houses battered by guns, no silence, no wilderness—nothing dating from the days of my father and Nicholas Sergeevich with their orderlies, their wine-cases, their billets. The town's life had long gone on without them, it had been rebuilt, and of course greatly improved, dazzlingly white, elegant, and hot, with spacious white-canopied cabs, with its Karaim and Greek crowd in the streets shaded with the bright verdure of Southern acacias, with magnificent tobacco shops, with its monument of the stooping Nakhimov in the square by the steps leading to the Grafskaya

landing stage, towards the green sea water and the battleships stationed outside it. There only, beyond that green expanse of water, there was something reminding me of my father—a place called Northside, the Common Graveyard; and from there alone the sadness and loveliness of the remote past, by now peaceful and immemorial, and even of something which seemed to be my own, now also long forgotten by everybody, drifted up towards me. . . .

And so I set out further. I spent the night somewhere on the outskirts, at a cheap inn, and early in the morning left Sevastopol. By noon I was already beyond Balaklava. . . . How lonely, how obscure, how youthfully happy I was that day! And how strange was the mountainous world surrounding me! The endless white road; the bare grey valleys ahead; the bare grey loaves of the hilltops far and near, disappearing one after another and insistently calling me somewhere with their lilac and ashen-grey masses, their torrid and mysterious sleep. . . . Where was that particular hill with white snowdrops? It vanished, drowned in some other unrecorded antiquity. I remember how I sat down and rested among some vast rocky valleys. A small Tartar herdsboy, a long crook in his hand, stood at some distance by a grey flock of sheep scattered like pebbles behind him. He was munching something. I walked to him, saw that he was eating bread with goat-cheese, and took out



a silver coin. Still munching and staring at me, he wagged his head and handed me the whole bag hanging from his shoulder. I took it—he scowled fondly and gladly, all his black-eyed face gleamed, his ears sticking out beneath his round cap twitched backwards. . . . And along the white road a carriage with three horses abreast drove past us with a clatter of hooves and tinkling of bells; on the box sat a Tartar cabman, in the carriage an old man with white eyebrows and a linen peaked cap, and by his side, all wrapped up, looking all waxy and yellow, a young girl with dark, terrible eyes. . . . More than once probably, many years later, in very different days, I saw her marble cross on the mountain over Yalta, among so many other crosses, under cypresses and roses, in the light fresh sea-breeze of a bright Southern day. . . .

At the Baidarsky Gate I spent the night on the porch of the post-stage. The stage-inspector refused to let me inside on learning that I was not going to use any horses. Beyond the Gate, in the fathomless dark abyss, the sea rumbled all night—timeless, slumbrous, full of incomprehensible, threatening majesty. Now and then I would enter under the Gate: land's end and pitch darkness; a strong whiff of fragrant mist and cold waves; the rumbling would cease, then rise again, swelling like the rumbling of a wild dense forest. . . . The abyss and the night, something blind and unquiet, living a painful life, a life as of the womb, senseless and hostile. . . .

## XVI

ON returning from anywhere one always has a feeling that something must have happened during one's absence, some letter, some news must have arrived. Usually it turns out that nothing did happen, nothing did arrive. With me it was, however, not so. My brother met me with great embarrassment: to begin with, my father had sold Baturino and sent us some money, writing a sad, an extremely sad and repentant, letter. . . . For a moment I flashed with joy—this meant a fresh opportunity of going somewhere; but instantly this feeling gave way to acute distress—this meant that all our former life was irrevocably over!—and to a bitter pity for my father and mother and Olya: here we were, gay and careless, we had spring-time, plenty of people, the town, and they had to stay there, in a wilderness, in solitude, in constant worry about us, and now about their own impending homelessness as well. . . . I had never been able to behold my father quietly in his sad moments, nor listen to his excuses for having beggared us all: at such moments I was always ready to run to him and even kiss his hands with what seemed to be warm gratitude for that very thing. And now, after Sevastopol, I could hardly hold back my tears. . . . Luckily it turned out that he had sold only the land, not the manor.

The second piece of news was still more startling.

My brother felt utterly confused when he told it. "Forgive me," he said, "for hiding it even from you; I didn't and still don't want our people to know about it. . . . The point is I am married. . . . Not legally, of course—she even goes on living with her husband, for the sake of the child—but you understand me. . . . Come and change, and we'll go to her; she knows and likes you in advance. . . ."

And he hastily told me his story. She came of a rich and aristocratic family, but grew up full of passionate dreams about freedom and good of the people, was early married in order to begin, "arm in arm with the man she loved", to live for the people only, to struggle for it. . . . Having through her become rich, the man she loved soon grew indifferent to his former aspirations, while to her they were something so holy and precious, and from her earliest youth had caused her, as one favoured, such distress over her own good fortune among all the misfortunes of the people, and such shame even for her beauty that once she tried to disfigure herself, to burn with vitriol her hands too much admired by everybody. . . . She had met my brother in the South—he was then in hiding, living under an assumed name. . . . On realizing that she loved him, she flung herself in despair into the sea, only to be saved by chance by some fishermen. . . .

Changing obediently, I listened to this story with great surprise, feeling greatly excited and averting

my eyes. For some reason I felt uneasy, annoyed about my brother; I felt a growing hostility towards his heroine—it all sounded much too romantic. Yet I was still more surprised when I crossed the threshold of her room in a large luxurious hotel where she was staying. How quickly she rose to meet me, how tenderly and familiarly she embraced me, how affectionately and wonderfully she smiled, how agreeably and easily she began to talk! The pleasant simplicity of her demeanour revealed the fine qualities of breeding, of upbringing, of a generous heart. She had a shy, womanly, yet amazingly untrammelled, charm; her gestures were soft and precise; in the timbre of her low-pitched, slightly sing-song and delicately harmonious voice, as also in the purity and clarity of her grey, rather sadly smiling eyes with black eyelashes, there was an unaccountable fascination. . . .

And yet I was wounded very much by this unexpected meeting, this sudden discovery that my brother had a life of his own, hidden from us all, an affection for someone other than ourselves. . . . Once more I felt lonely, with all my youthfulness, in that springlike atmosphere which surrounded me, and felt a bitter disappointment. But at the same time I seemed to have said to myself: "Well, so much the better for me—I'm quite free now in that wonderful country which has just revealed itself to me. . . ." And that country I fancied to myself as the boundless springtime expanse of all

that Southern Russia, which fascinated me more and more both in its old and its modern aspects. As for the modern, there was a vast and wealthy country, with beautiful cornfields and steppes, cottages and villages, the Dnieper and Kiev, its strong and tender-hearted people, fine and neat down to the smallest details of its life—the heir to the real Slavs, those of the Danube, of the Carpathians. And as for the old, there was its cradle, the Svyatopolks and Igors, the Pechénegs and the Polovtsy—even those very words held out a fascination for me—then the age of the Cossacks' battles against Turks and Poles, Porogi and Khortitsa, the low islands and estuaries of Kherson. . . .

The *Tale of the Campaign of Igor* fired my imagination:

“‘I wish,’ he said, ‘to break my spear on the border of the Polovtsy’s land, together with you, Russians. . . .’ ‘Not a storm is driving falcons across the wide fields—flocks of daws hasten to the great Don. . . .’ ‘Horses neigh beyond the Sula; glory resounds in Kiev; trumpets blare in Novgorod; banners stand at Putivl. . . .’ Then Igor stepped into his golden stirrup, and galloped into the open field. The sun barred his way with darkness; night, groaning with thunder, roused the birds; Div called from the top of a tree, bidding hearken lands unknown, the Volga, the Sea-border, and the Sula country. . . .”

“... Carth creak at midnight, like swans let

loose. Igor leads his hosts to the Don. . . . Eagles shriek and call the beasts to a feast of bones; foxes yelp at the crimson shields. O Russian land, thou art beyond the hill. . . .”

“Quite early the next morning, a blood-stained dawn announces the day; black clouds come from the sea . . . blue lightnings quiver through them; there will be a mighty thunder, and arrows shall rain down. . . .”

And then:

“What noise is this, what rumour, I hear, early before the daybreak?”

“Svyatoslav dreamed a confused dream. ‘In Kiev, on the mounts,’ he said, ‘they dressed me last night in a black shroud on a bed of yew. They poured out to me blue wine mixed with sorrow. . . .’

“The sea spurted at midnight. . . . God shows Prince Igor the way out of the land of the Polovtsy into the Russian land, to his father’s golden throne. The evening lights have gone out; Igor sleeps, Igor wakes, Igor in his mind measures the plains from the great Don to the little Donets. . . .”

And before long I again set out on my wanderings. I visited those very banks of the Donets where in the olden days the Prince had fled from captivity “like an ermine into the rushes, like a white mew to the water”; then I went to the Dnieper, to the very spot where it “pierced the rocky mountains across the Polovtsy’s land”; I sailed past the white,

springlike villages amidst fathomless Dnieper plains blue with sun and air, upstream, towards Kiev—and how can I tell what singing echoes that spring and the tale of Igor awoke in me at the time: “The sun shines in heaven; Prince Igor in the land of Russia. Maidens sing on the Danube: their voices trail across the sea to Kiev. . . .”

And from Kiev I made my way to Kursk, to Putivl. “Saddle, brother, your swift steeds; mine are ready for you, saddled outside Kursk. . . .” It was only many years later that the sense of Kostroma, Suzdal, Uglich, and Rostov the Great, awoke in me: in those days I lived under a different spell. What did it matter if Kursk turned out to be but a dreary county town, and the dusty Putivl still drearier? Hadn’t there been the same wilderness, the same dust in the days when, early, as dawn broke over the steppe, on the wall planted with stakes, “Yaroslavna’s lament” was heard?

“Yaroslavna, early in the morning, laments at Putivl town. ‘I will fly,’ she says, ‘like a cuckoo along the Danube; I will wet my beaver sleeve in the Kayala river; I will wipe the Prince’s bloody wounds. . . .’”

## XVII

By that route I was already returning home. Now I was even in a hurry to get there: my nomadic passion was for the time being stilled; I longed for

rest and work, and looked forward to the summer awaiting me at Baturino as to something admirable—so full was I of the fairest hopes and plans, and of confidence in destiny. But notoriously there is nothing more dangerous than an excess of confidence in that. . . .

In short, I stopped at Orel on my way.

Here I felt my wanderings to be nearly over: a few hours more and I should be in Baturino. It only remained for me to cast a glance at Orel itself—the town of Leskov and Turgenev—and to find out at last what editorial and printing offices were like.

The briskness I felt was something extraordinary. But I had grown black and lean like a gipsy after five fairs: so far had I walked, so long sailed on the Dnieper, all the time on deck, in the joyous heat of the sun, in the gleaming of the water and of the steamer's hot funnel, over which, all day long, hovered and melted something very fine, glassy, azure-fiery; in the stuffiness and dense warmth—of men, of the engine-room, of the kitchen. One deserved, therefore, at last some compensation. And so, alighting at Orel, I took a cab and told the cabman to drive me to the best hotel. . . . It was a dusty lilac dusk; evening lights were scattered all over the place; a band played in the public garden, beyond the river. . . . Everyone knows the vague, sweetly disturbing feelings one has in the evening in an unfamiliar large town, in complete solitude. With such feeling I dined in the empty



dining-room of the old and respectable provincial hotel to which I had been taken, and afterwards sat on the iron balcony of my room, over a street lamp burning under a tree, and giving a bright, elegant, dainty, though metallic, appearance to the translucent foliage. Below me people walked to and fro, talking, laughing, with lighted cigarettes; in the large houses opposite, windows were thrown open and beyond them one saw lit-up rooms, people seated round a tea-table, or engaged in some work—a strange, alluring life which in those hours one watches with a particularly keen sense of observation. Afterwards, in my endless wanderings about the world, I lived through many similar hours of solitary quiet and observation, and to many of them I owe a rather bitter wisdom. But on that warm night in Orel, with its regimental band blowing over to me, from beyond the river, now its sing-song languor, now the sadness or the rapture of its noise, I made light of wisdom. Secretly, of course, I was again awaiting that which appeared then as supreme joy, as the consummation of all happiness. . . .

I had become quite disused to sleeping properly—and the large, comfortable, clean bed, the darkness, stillness and spaciousness of my room even struck me that night as strange. I even woke up as a traveller does—with the daybreak. This accounts for my appearing at the offices of *The Voice* at an unearthly hour.

The morning was hot—the spring had been quite exceptional. The main street, white and bare, was still deserted. In order somehow to bring the moment nearer when, as I thought, it would be possible without infringing the rules of decency to appear at the editorial office, I walked first along that street, crossed a bridge, reached another street, large and lined with shops, all sorts of old warehouses and stores, ironmongers', chandlers' and grocers' shops, and generally bearing witness to all that ponderous and plentiful well-being of which Russian towns were chock-full at the time. In harmony with that plenty and the rich morning sunlight, a dense and solemn kindly pealing of bells for Mass came from the tall, heavy church by the bank of the Orlik. Accompanied by those booming bells—they boomed even right inside me—I crossed one more bridge, climbed the hill towards the Government buildings, huge houses dating from the days of Alexander I and Nicholas I, in front of which a boulevard ran to the right and left, parallel with the long bright square, a wide avenue of lime-trees in their morning freshness, with a transparent shade. I knew the name of the street where the offices of *The Voice* were situated, and asked a passer-by whether it was far.

"Over there, quite close to here," he said, and suddenly I felt my heart thump. presently I should be there!

The simplicity of that editorial office, however,

was quite provincial. Beyond the square stretched garden after garden, quiet shady streets all drowned in gardens and overgrown with thick grass. In such a street, in a large garden, stood the long grey house containing the editorial offices. I approached, saw a door standing ajar right on the street, and pulled the handle of the bell. . . . It jangled somewhere in the distance, but with no effect whatever: the house seemed deserted, after all just like everything else around me: the stillness, the gardens, the lovely bright morning of a provincial steppe town. . . . I rang once more, waited for a while, and at last decided to walk in. The long passage led somewhere into deep recesses. I went on and saw a large, low, extremely dirty room, encumbered all over with machinery, trampled, strewn with dirty greasy paper. All the machines were in motion and rumbled regularly, rolling some dark leaden boards forwards and backwards beneath their rollers, raising and lowering regularly some grates, laying aside, one after one, large sheets of paper, still white at the bottom, but on top already covered as if with grains of black shiny caviar; and from all these machines, their rumbling noise mingling sometimes with the voices of printers and compositors shouting to each other, came an odorous wind, a strong and pleasant smell of fresh printing ink, of paper, lead, kerosene and oil—things which instantly (and for ever) acquired for me such a peculiar and delicious meaning.

"The editorial office?" somebody shouted angrily out of that wind, noise and rumbling. "This is the printing office! Hello, take him to the editorial office!"

And heaven knows from where, a dirty boy, his round head spattered thickly with lead, dashed right up to me.

"This way, please."

With hurried excitement I followed him back into the passage, and a moment later was sitting in the vast reception-room of the editor, who turned out to be a very pretty young lady—small and plump, very businesslike, lively, with dimples brightening up whenever she smiled; and in another five minutes I was already in the dining-room drinking coffee in quite a homelike fashion. Now and again I was plied with food and constantly questioned; a few flattering remarks were made about my poems published in the St. Petersburg and Moscow monthlies, and I was asked to contribute to *The Voice*. . . . I blushed, thanked her and smiled awkwardly, trying to hold down the almost rapturous delight which that unexpectedly wonderful acquaintance, that hospitality and attention had caused me to feel, and took with slightly trembling hands some home-made cakes which melted quickly and sweetly in my mouth. . . . And behind the large Venetian windows rose the bright-green sunlit garden, cheerfully and youthfully looking into the house and reminding one

that in the world there was that serenely happy morning, vast Russia with all her fields, forests, and rivers, wealthy and ancient Orel, and the railway to Baturino. . . . All this ended with my hostess suddenly pausing at the sound of animated female voices behind the door, laughing and saying:

"And here are my beauties who have overslept! I will presently introduce you to two charming creatures, my cousin Lika M., and her friend Sashenka Obolenskaya. . . ."

And immediately two tall young girls in floridly embroidered Russian dresses, with coloured beads and ribbons, with loose sleeves leaving their youthful rounded arms bare to the elbow, entered the dining-room, laughing at something too. . . .

## XIX

AMAZING were the rapidity and inertia, the somnambulism, with which I yielded to all that so accidentally befell me, beginning with such happy carelessness and ease, only to bring afterwards so much pain and grief, to deprive me of so much mental and bodily force, to ruin so many of my best days!

Why did my choice fall on Lika? Obolenskaya was in every way better than she. Recalling her now, I see so clearly her advantages, and in general feel towards her in a way that still makes me regret

having lost her, not having been linked with her by fate, being parted from her only by chance (and I think it was chance). It needed no particular attention to appreciate her: she was of dusky complexion, tall and strong in her lovely youthful slimness, with thick slightly curling, wiry black hair, very neatly dressed: there was a noble simplicity and firmness in her dark ardent eyes, in her intelligent and precise judgments; her love, I think, would not have been very easy, but it would have been worthy of my youth, would have left a deep poetical mark on my life. . . . But at the time my attention was either insufficient, or accidentally distracted by the fact that Lika looked at me with friendlier and more attentive eyes, talked to me in a simpler and livelier way than Obolenskaya. . . . And with whom did I so rapidly fall in love? With everything, of course: with that young female society to which I was so suddenly introduced, and which, heaven knows why, received me with such cheerful kindness; with my hostess's slipper, and with the embroidered frocks of these young girls, with all their ribbons and beads, their rounded arms and plump, elongated knees; with those spacious, low-ceilinged provincial rooms, their windows facing the sunlit garden; finally, even with the fact that the nurse brought to the dining-room a flushed and slightly perspiring fair-haired boy, back from a walk, who gazed at me gravely and attentively whilst his mother kissed him and

unbuttoned his coat. . . . Here, by the way, the table began to be cleared and laid for lunch, and it suddenly occurred to my hostess that I need not go away from lunch nor leave Orel so soon as all that, and Lika snatched my cap, sat at the piano and began strumming some silly tune on it. . . . To cut a long story short, it was three o'clock when I left the editorial offices, surprised to think how quickly all had passed: I did not know as yet that this quickness, this disappearance of time, is the first sign of the beginnings of the so-called falling-in-love, the early stage of which is always senselessly gay, resembling an intoxication with ether; nor did I know that this intoxication alone accounts for the admiration for the object of one's love, in which one sometimes lives for a long time, feeling quite incapable of understanding it afterwards when it passes, and marvelling at one's former self as at a man who has passed through a real madness. . . .

## XX

Thus began for me another love which was destined to become a great event in my life. And that beginning was marked by a doubly marvellous episode.

I was leaving Orel as something already dear and familiar, with all the sorrow and tenderness of a first lover's parting and with ardent hopes for a new

and early meeting. And why should it have happened that on that precise day there passed through Orel a certain funeral train of extreme importance! It was due at two o'clock sharp, an hour only before my train, and therefore my new friend, the proprietor of *The Voice*, who had to assist at the arrival, offered to drive me to the station and thus give me an opportunity of seeing a rare sight. And now, just as unexpectedly as everything that happened to me in Orel, I found myself in a large, but very select crowd, awaiting, in front of the rows of soldiers solemnly marshalled on the platform, the arrival of that majestic and uncanny something which somewhere was already rolling thither, approaching us; in the company of various distinguished town and county representatives, of tail-coats, embroidered uniforms, three-cornered hats, heavy military epaulets, and a whole conclave of glistening cassocks and mitres. Anyone who gets into such a solemnly high-strung company, is at once infected with a certain numbness, so that, after standing still on the platform for about half-an-hour, I came to my senses only at that unexpected moment when, suddenly, a huge engine decorated with mourning flags, with noise and clatter, swept upon us as it were and then a gorgeous, dark-blue something, with large clean windows and silk blinds, with golden eagles of the coats-of-arms flashed before our eyes. . . . Here the whole crowd waiting at the station moved back, and



from the middle carriage of the train, which stopped softly and precisely immediately after, someone quickly appeared and stepped on to the red cloth spread out beforehand on the platform—a young giant with bright fair hair, in red hussar's uniform, with sharp regular features and fine nostrils, curved vigorously and as it were slightly contemptuously, with a rather too prominent chin; who struck me by his inhuman tallness, the length of his slender legs, the keenness of his regal eyes; but above all by his head, proudly and lightly thrown back, with short and waved bright fair hair, and a small pointed red beard curling firmly and beautifully. . . .

Could I have thought on that hot spring day *how* and *where* I was to see him once more!

## XXI

A WHOLE life has passed since then.

Russia, Orel, spring. . . . And here, now, France, the South, Mediterranean winter days.

For long both of us have lived in a foreign country. This winter he is a close neighbour of mine, and seriously ill. One morning, unfolding a local French paper I suddenly let it drop: the end. I have been long and anxiously following the course of his illness in the newspapers, time and again looking down from my mountain at that distant hump-backed promontory where his presence made itself

felt all the time. Now there is an end to that presence.

It is sunny, bright, and cold. I come out from the house into the garden falling in its terraces to the small gravelled square under the palms, whence one can see a whole country of valleys, sea and mountains glittering in the sun and the blue air. A vast wooded lowland, its waves, hillocks and cavities gradually rising, stretches from the sea to the foot of the Alps where I am. Below me, on a steep rocky ridge, one of the oldest villages of Provence nestles round the remains of its ancient fortress with the rude, primitive Saracen towers— itself also extremely rough, grey, stony, terraced, fused into a single whole, its crooked slating making it look as if it were covered on top with rusty scales. To the right lie the ridges of Esterel and the Maures turning blue in the everlasting sunny 'haze. On the horizon ahead, the misty, nebulous white of the distant sea rises towards the luminously hazy sky. And *that* humpbacked promontory lies a little to the left, bathed in the morning sea-gleam that quivers around it. . . . I look long in that direction. The rising mistral flies up now and then as far as the garden, stirs the hard, long leaves of the palms, makes a dry, cold rustle among them as if among graveyard wreaths. . . . Shall I go there? It is inconceivably strange to have met but twice, and both times in company of death. But then everything is inconceivable. Here is he,

in the prime of life, proceeding on his solemn funereal mission with his father's coffin, right across Russia, from South to North; here am I, absurdly glad in my youth, and with that happiness destined to ruin some of its best years, standing at the station in Orel, awaiting him with something like a dull hostility. . . . And this sun, glowing there so blindingly, plunging the sunny, hazy peaks yonder into their ancient, idly happy dreams of all the ages and races they have beheld—can that really be the same sun which once shone upon us both?

## XXII

ALL day long there has been mistral, a sharp rustling and crackling of the palms, a restless wintry glitter.

Towards evening it seems to subside.

At four o'clock I am already on the promontory, hurrying *thither*.

The road climbs through dense masses of southern gardens, following a long avenue whence, with a rough clatter and clanging a tramcar rolls towards us. . . .

Here it is at last, that big old estate, that large white house at the foot of a vast and spacious garden, behind the wide-open gate, at the end of a long avenue of old and gloomy palm-trees. The late afternoon sun, all the light and glitter of the western sky is behind the house.

This is the first uncanny thing—that gate which

death has opened wide and free to all, and a multitude of motor-cars standing by.

But the avenue is deserted, everybody is already indoors. Rapidly I walk towards the house. The gravel crunches under my feet.

Before the porch, too, all is deserted. "This way?"

But I utter those words only because I feel suddenly bewildered: all of a sudden I notice on the porch a thing which I have not seen for full ten years, and which strikes me like the whole of my former life suddenly and miraculously resuscitated before my eyes: a Russian officer, clear-eyed and with ruddy moustache, wearing a tunic with 'shoulder-straps. . . .

Beyond him I see a high glass door, wide-open too. Beyond the door is a half-dark vestibule, and another similar door, and still further the half-light of a large French drawing-room, something strange and beautiful: silk blinds lowered on the high semi-circular windows, and letting in the garnet-hued light of the sun they conceal, and a lustre already lighted at this unusual early hour and sparkling with a yellowish-pink pearly light.

In the hall is a crowd of silent people. With a peculiar resignation I make my way towards the second door, and then raise my eyes—and instantly notice the large yellow-grey countenance reposing in an inordinately long coffin, in a yellow oaken

sarcophagus, the high Romanov brow, the whole of that dead old man's head, no longer fair, but grey, yet still imperious and proud: the small beard, grown grey, juts slightly forward, the finely carved nostrils look slightly contemptuous. . . .

Then I notice and take in the details. Yes, a strange half-light; the lowered blinds letting through the red light of the late afternoon's sun; the lustre sparkling with pearls; the thin, pale, fluttering lights of the tall church candlesticks. Here there are people too, but only along the walls, and nearly all the space in the middle of the drawing-room is occupied by *him*. Against the wall on the left, the coffin-lid of unusual shape—widened at the sides, tall and glistening with its yellow varnished oak, stands upright, leaning on the marble mantelpiece with a draped looking-glass. Right in the corner, behind the head of the coffin, an ikon-light burns on a small table before an ancient silver ikon, timid and tender as in a nursery.

Nearly all the rest of the room is occupied by the coffin. It is also strangely widened at the flanks, exceedingly long and deep, gleaming with its newness, varnish, fitness—and the terrifying thing is that, within it, is still another leaden coffin, padded inside with white ribbed velvet, but nevertheless showing its blackened metallic edges. Around the coffin his last guard of honour, consisting of officers and Cossacks, stand in stiff, smart military attitudes, with drawn swords raised to the right

shoulder, their caps on their bent left arms; their eyes, expressing with a sharp emphasis their absolute obedience and readiness, are fixed on *him*. He himself, lying full-length, revealing his extraordinary stature, and half-covered with a tricolour flag, looks even more rigid. His head, once so striking and elegant, looks simple now and democratic in an old man's way. The grey hair is soft and thin, the brow rather bald. This head now looks large—so childishly thin and narrow have his shoulders become. He wears an old, quite plain, ruddy-grey Cossack uniform, with no decorations except the Cross of St. George on his breast, with loose, much too short sleeves, exposing, above his long flat hands, his large yellowish arms, clumsily and heavily crossed; his hands are those of an old man, too, though still powerful, striking one by their woodenness and by the fact that with one of them he clasps in his fist, with menacing firmness, like a sword, an old cypress cross from Mount. Athos, blackened with age. . . . I approach and take a place close to the foot of the coffin, by the palm branches and wreaths leaning upon it.

Immediately the service begins. From the inner rooms come his relatives and friends; the old priest puts on his cassock—he is really old, as is usually the case; the lights of the wax candles in our hands burn warmly and tenderly. . . . How accustomed one is to all this by now—that low, harmonious

chanting, the rhythmic tinkling of the censer, the sorrowfully submissive, dolefully affectionate invocations and supplications having already sounded a million times on earth! Only the names change in these supplications, and for every name the turn comes in due time!

*"Blessed is our God always, now, and ever, and unto ages of ages!"*

*"In peace let us pray to the Lord. . . ."*

*". . . for the ever memorable servant of God. . . ."*

I still think of the man who once, on a hot sunny day, had been at the station in Orel. But only for a moment that bright vision flashes past in my mind. Sorrowfully and hesitatingly sound the supplications for the "godly Prince, the Grand-Duke" who has just departed to join the host of all those who "yearn for Christ's solace" and now with them is humbly awaiting "peace, stillness, blissful memory", hoping "to present himself blameless before the dread throne of the Lord of Glory. . . ." His dead countenance, already turned to something outside our reach, is still full of expression, but already quiet and still. His prominent eyelids are closed, his colourless lips are pressed tight, ashen under the moustache. . . . I notice the slightly swollen veins on his broad, aged temples and think—"to-morrow they will already be black". . . . I think of his past life, so vast and complex; and I think too of my own. . . .

*"And further we pray for the peace of the soul of Thy departed servant . . . and that Thou wilt forgive him all his sins, whether voluntary or involuntary. . . ."*

*"God's mercy, the Kingdom of Heaven and the remission of our sins we entreat of Christ, our King and God Immortal. . . ."*

Then my eyes rest once more on the tricolour flag half-covering his legs, his Cossack uniform; they see that petrified hand clasping the black cross, those rigid faces of the guards, so tense and alert, their peaked caps, blades and epaulets, which I have not seen for ten years. . . .

*"I am the image of Thy ineffable glory—be generous to Thy creature, O Lord, and grant unto me the home-country of my heart's desire. . . ."*

I kneel and, clenching my teeth, weep passionately. . . .

When we all come out, it is already evening. The sun has just set; behind us, beyond the black palms, is a deep pink light in the sky.\* And ahead of us, far-off, is the vast picture of those eternal Mediterranean shores. In the background, against the dim, chill, rosy-blue eastern sky, everything is dominated by the dead mass of the snowy Alpine ridges, their flaming crimson already mournfully fading away, utterly alien to all living things, vanishing into their wild wintry darkness, their foothills already drowning in the dense grey-blue haze. As night draws on, the sea at their foot has taken on a stern, cold blue. . . .



## XXIII

DURING the night, on my hilltop, the mistral sets everything booming, roaring, raging. Suddenly I wake up. In a dream I have just seen, or fancied, that during the leave-taking after the requiem, a tall slim girl was the last of those near to *him* to take leave of him. Dressed all in black, with a long mourning veil, she approached him so simply, bent over him with such womanly love, and for an instant the fluttering end of her veil hid at once the coffin's edge and the old, yet childlike, uniformed shoulder. . . . The mistral rushes on and on; the branches of the palm-trees, rustling in stormy confusion, seem also to be rushing somewhere. . . . I rise, and with difficulty push open the door on to the balcony. The cold strikes me in the face, and overhead a jet-black sky opens wide, covered with blazing stars, white and blue and red. Everything is rushing somewhere, on and on. . . .

Slowly I make the sign of the Cross, gazing up at that baleful, sable-hued thing which blazes above my head.